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KODANSHA BOX

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西尾維新 NISIOISIN

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Illustration／VOFAN

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Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 001

The story is of me, Hanekawa Tsubasa, but it cannot be told by me. This is because I cannot define how much of me is actually myself in the first place. I am sure there had been a literary master who once wrote how, if one were to stretch out one's foot, one would not think of the toes as part of oneself, but in my case, I would not even need to stretch my foot, as I am doubtful as to whether this heart itself is my own.

Am I me?

What am I?

Who am I?

Who? -- I am me.

What? -- I am myself.

For example, could these profound thoughts on utter absurdities such as the above truly be called 'me'?

You might speak of it thus, if you were only to speak. However, this is simply a thought, a way of thinking, and while it may even be a memory, it is nothing more than the accumulation of knowledge, so to speak. If you were to say that it is my experiences that define me, then in that case, if there were a human being with the exact same experiences as mine, would it be just as well to call her 'me'?

Even if there were a 'me' outside of myself, that is still me.

If so, then would I disappear if I were not as myself? -- How would I think, what would my thoughts be?

The name of Hanekawa Tsubasa is already unstable to begin with.

I have changed my surname many times.

That is why an identity cannot be hoped for from my name -- not in the

slightest. The idea that the name is merely a symbol is one that I understand deeply, even physically, as it were.

In facing abnormalities, understanding the name of the subject is important above all else -- or at least the first step, so the big reason why I haven't been able to face myself thus far is perhaps because I do not recognise my name as something of my own.

In that case, I should first know of my own name.

I should know of myself as Hanekawa Tsubasa.

It is only then that I will be able to define myself.

Of course, when I think about how Araragi-kun would not be one to stop and nitpick about these things, the ridiculousness of my own standstill becomes laughable. I become embarrassed when I think about how Araragi-kun, even after becoming a vampire or becoming non-human or being dragged into the other world by various abnormalities, would always continue on as Araragi Koyomi, unwaveringly himself, unwaveringly his own man.

Perhaps he does not realize this himself.

Even though it can be seen, as clear as a flame, by those around him that he would continue on as himself in whatever the time and place, unexpectedly, perhaps he does not realize this.

He has no need to realize it.

Araragi Koyomi is, confidently, 'Araragi Koyomi'.

And that is why he can always tell his own story.

That is why I like him.

Hanekawa Tsubasa likes Araragi Koyomi.

In the end, in talking about myself, I can start only from there. That is the only part of me which is certain, strangely. Like how, for example, when I sit down to study by myself at the library, I would abruptly write such a name as "Araragi Tsubasa" in the corner.

That is sufficient for my story.

In the sixty adventures of Sherlock Holmes, the great detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, there exist only two stories that were narrated not by his assistant Dr Watson but by Holmes himself. They are problematic works treated as spurious by Sherlockians, but in the beginning of one of the stories, "The Blanched Soldier", Mr Holmes had this to say:

"The ideas of my friend Watson, though limited, are exceedingly pertinacious. For a long time he has worried me to write an experience of my own. Perhaps I have rather invited this persecution, since I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures. 'Try it yourself, Holmes!' he has retorted, and I am compelled to admit that, having taken my pen in my hand, I do begin to realise that the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader."

As is the norm, I had been enchanted by the degree to which Sherlock Holmes exceeded normal men, and would read about his acts with excitement, which was why I was taken aback by this sudden talk from his 'true voice'.

Frankly, I was disappointed.

Why did he, a man who had displayed himself as terribly superhuman all this time, say something so human now? I felt something like betrayal.

But now I know, of his humanity which could not bear the gap between himself and the 'superhuman' which Watson spoke of.

Of his wish to find excuses.

In the end, the detective was told by his assistant to 'try it himself', and these two stories were published -- I will state at the beginning that, well, this story is that kind of story to me.

This is a story to let you know that I, exaggeratedly spoken of like a historical saint or holy mother by Araragi-kun, am simply a human being.

To let you know that I am a cat, and a tiger.

And a story to let you know that I am human, and a story of utter disappointment, of betrayal.

I don't think I can tell it as skilfully as Araragi-kun can, but I think I will leave it up to chance and try my best. After all, that is undoubtedly how anyone would tell of her own life.

Now then.

The time has come to wake up from the nightmare.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 002

According to rumors, Araragi-kun's little sisters Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan took the initiative of waking him up every morning. They would always come to wake him up without fail, regardless of whether it was a weekday, a day off or a holiday, or so it had been said. Araragi-kun seemed to think of it a considerable nuisance, but from where I stood, they all looked like nothing if not 'close siblings'.

In fact, as would be normal, I was totally jealous.

Truly, I was.

Just how many brothers in the world could be so dearly loved as to be woken up like that every morning? -- although in this case, perhaps the one I was jealous of was not Araragi-kun himself, but Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan who could see his sleeping face every day.

Oh, I was so totally jealous.

Truly, I was.

Well, to speak of how I, Hanekawa Tsubasa, woke up; like Araragi-kun and his sisters, I would be woken up every morning by Rumba.

Rumba was, of course, not the name of the Hanekawa family's cat, nor my strikingly-named little sister Hanekawa Rumba, but a run-of-the-mill iRobot automatic vacuum cleaner, or in model number, a Rumba 577.

It's set on a timer to automatically start working at six every morning, and when said smart vacuum cleaner bumped into and pushed against my head, I wake up.

How refreshing.

Be that as it might, like all vacuum cleaners the Rumba made quite a lot of noise as it cleaned, so by the time it crawled down the hallway and gotten close to me, I had actually already woken up -- and yet, the fact that I would continue

to lay in bed until my head was being pushed, waiting with my eyes closed for the bump, was perhaps because I longed for the sensation of 'being woken up by someone', or simply 'being woken up' itself.

Like Sleeping Beauty, poetically speaking.

Well, not that anything would be poetic with the other party being a vacuum cleaner.

Sleeping Beauty -- that was quite something, coming from myself.

Even with regards to the Rumba, seeing as there was someone sleeping in the hallway as it cleaned there, it's probably a nuisance to it as well.

Yes, I sleep in the hallway.

I sleep in a *futon* laid out in the second-floor hallway of a detached house.

I had once thought that this was something normal and quite obvious, but apparently that was not the case. As such, ever since losing a friend with whom I talked to about this when I still had not known the truth, I haven't talked about this in a particularly open manner.

Not that I particularly wanted my own bed after such a long time.

It had become natural.

I didn't want things that were natural to change.

It's not as though I'd ever childishly thought of wanting my own room, and when I talked about this to the classmate I became friends with, Senjougahara-san, figuring she would be fine hearing it,

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

was what she had said.

"My house doesn't even have a hallway to begin with."

From the perspective of a girl who lived with her parent in a one-room apartment, this might seem like the worries of the ostentatious, and I wasn't worrying in the first place.

Well.

Perhaps that's wrong.

I imagine that perhaps I did not want to make this house 'the place I belong to'. It's something like the opposite of an animal's marking -- perhaps I wanted to keep my distance from the house.

I didn't want any trace of myself to be left in this house.

None if at all possible.

Perhaps that was why.

...Putting aside why I must make conjectures and suppositions about my own heart, or why I could only ever say 'perhaps'.

"Well, no matter what I want, in a few more months it won't matter, so I shouldn't give it too much thought."

Speaking to myself, I folded up my *futon*.

I didn't have any problems getting up in the morning.

Or rather, I didn't quite understand this sensation of being 'half-asleep'.

The on-and off-states of my consciousness were probably more distinct that they needed to be.

If only I could just sleep when I felt sleepy.

Sometimes I would think that.

"It's probably because I'm out of sync with other people with sensations like that. Araragi-kun tells me that a lot. 'The things you do that you think are natural are simply miracles to me' and such -- but it's going too far to call them miracles."

My soliloquy continued.

I wouldn't do it outside, but I couldn't help but frequently talk to myself when at home. If I didn't, I felt like I would forget how to speak.

I wasn't sure what to make of this.

Just as I wasn't sure what to think of Araragi-kun coming up during said soliloquy and of myself then naturally breaking into a smile.

Storing the *futon* in a closet, I went to the bathroom to wash my face.

After that, I put on my contacts.

Back when I had been wearing glasses, putting a lens directly onto the eyes seemed so horrifying that I didn't even want to think about it, so of course, when I first started, I was so scared that I wanted to put the lens on with my eye closed (metaphorically speaking) but it was nothing special once I got used to it.

You could get used to anything.

Better yet, it took the burden off my nose and ears, so it's more comfortable than glasses.

It was simply that, thinking of what's to come in the following year, neither contacts nor glasses felt like they would be convenient companions, so now I had come to thinking I might as well bring myself to get a LASIK surgery done during my school hours.

Tidying myself up, I headed to the dining room.

There, the ones whom I should call Father and Mother were, as always, sitting at the same table and eating breakfast separately.

They did not even look at me when I entered the room.

I did not look at them, either.

Simply entering my field of vision did not mean seeing, if the eyes in my heart and mind would always avert its gaze. If it was difficult to see with the eyes, then it was simpler to not see.

Only the voice of the newscaster on TV, talking about the top news of today, resounded through the dining room.

Why was it, I wonder?

Why was it that I felt closer to this newscaster in some far-off place, than to the two in the same room as me?

Truly, I wonder.

I might as well say "good morning" to her.

Speaking of which, I wonder how many years it had been since I last said "good

morning" in this house. I attempted to search through my memories, but I couldn't remember one single instance at all. I remembered saying it to the Rumba about five times (as aforementioned, I said it not while half-asleep, but it was very natural. That vacuum cleaner sometimes felt strangely alive in its movements.) but I really could not remember a single time I said it to the ones I should call my father and mother.

Not once.

Huh.

That's pretty shocking.

Previously, I told Araragi-kun something along the lines of, "I do plan on approaching my parents myself" but it would seem that was different from the truth. Well, it wasn't anything new for my words to be full of lies.

I was made of lies.

A far cry from truth -- that was I, Hanekawa Tsubasa.

Even my name was fake, after all.

Closing the door without making a sound, I headed not for the table but the kitchen first. I had to make breakfast, but I couldn't say that it wasn't because I wanted to postpone the moment when I would have to sit with those people for as long as I could.

It was futile, or rather, empty resistance.

You could forgive this level of resistance.

It had yet to become a coup d'etat.

In the kitchen of the house -- that is, the one I do not want to call 'my home' in my mind -- there was generally speaking a lot of cookware. There were three cutting boards and three kitchen knives. Milk pans and frying pans were three apiece as well. At any rate, there's three of everything. As for what this signified, yes, it would mean the three people living in this house all used their respective cookware.

There had been an episode when I talked to and lost a friend over this as well.

Having to redraw the hot water every time one of us takes a bath, doing the laundry individually; episodes like that are too numerous to mention, but it's strange.

I didn't think of these as unnatural at all, and no matter how many friends I lost over it -- I never felt the need to make the Hanekawa house like other homes because of this.

We more or less all leave the house at the same time, so we all 'happen to' gather when we eat breakfast, but it's similar to sharing a table with strangers at a cafeteria. there was no talk, and no one would do anything like incidentally making breakfast for the other two.

Choosing my own cookware, I began cooking.

Not that I plan on being elaborate enough in my cooking to deserve the term.

After making enough rice for one and preparing miso soup, fried eggs and fish, as well as a salad (I get told that I eat too much, but I'm the type who stuff myself full at breakfast) I split the meal into three parts and carried it to the table. Finally, I made one more round trip to make tea. I wouldn't have to make four and a half round trips if I had some help, but of course, there were no helping hands in this house. Not even the Rumba could help me that much.

Thinking how good it would be if Araragi-kun could help me, I reached the table.

"Thanks for the meal."

After putting my hands together and saying this, I took up my chopsticks.

I have never heard the other two saying something like that, but even if I never say "good morning" and "good night", I never leave out a "thanks for the meal" or "I'm done eating".

I never leave them out, especially since after the spring break.

After all, they were words meant for the animals and plants which had been alive before becoming foodstuff, which would become my flesh and blood.

They were lives which had been killed for my sake.

I would accept them with gratitude.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 003

After eating breakfast, I changed from my pajamas to my uniform, and left the house shortly. It seems to take about eighty pages for Araragi-kun to leave his house, but this is it for me. That is the distinct difference between a family you would not want to leave behind, and one you would.

In any case, today was the start of a new trimester.

It made me sigh with relief.

At heart, it felt like I was being saved.

The new trimester had always been my lifesaver.

Days off were strolling days for me -- although I referred to it that way, I could only wander about for so long. I might as well be a juvenile delinquent. I had worked as a home tutor for Araragi-kun since summer break, as he prepared for university entrance exams, and while it was for the sake of raising his academic capabilities, but seen from another angle, it might just be an excuse not to go back to that house.

And that was why -- school made me sigh with relief.

It made me feel at ease.

Well, whether it's strolling, or being a home tutor, or going to school,

the fact was that, in the end, I would have to go back to that house, so it wasn't really something to be melancholic about -- that's right.

To me, it is nothing more than "going back", never "going home".

At the end, Tyltyl and Mytyl realised that the bluebird of happiness was in their own home, but where should the bluebird be sought for those without a home?

Or should we seek for something else?

Perhaps what we should seek for is not a bluebird, but -- a white cat.

Besides, negatively speaking, even if a bluebird were to be found in one's own home, that does not mean that a beast of misfortune did not lurk there in a similar manner.

I thought these things as I walked on, and my goodness, was that a twin-tailed girl who appeared in my way?

"Oh my, Hanekawa-san?"

With that, the girl -- Hachikuji Mayoi turned around and clattered over to me, sweetly. Everything she did was just too adorable. How conscious was she of the fact that it was this loveliness of hers that would drive Araragi-kun crazy?

"So you're going back to school starting today, Hanekawa-san."

"Yep, that's right."

"Devoting oneself to one's studies is quite an extraordinary endeavour, isn't it? Indeed, even I, as a primary-schooler, remember the days when I surpassed many trials and tribulations. The crushing amount of homework I had during summer break might well be called the records of my war."

"Huh..."

Whenever she spoke with someone other than Araragi-kun, it felt like the things she said just did not fit the conversation -- as I thought this, I responded.

"What are you doing here, Mayoi-chan?"

"I'm looking for Araragi-san."

She said.

Oh, my.

I should be the one saying "oh my".

I would understand it if it was Araragi-kun loitering around and looking for Mayoi-chan, but it was really unusual for Mayoi-chan to be looking for Araragi-kun instead.

Actually, speaking of which, didn't something like this happen before? At that time, it had been because Shinobu-chan was missing -- could it be that something like that had happened again?

As though perceiving from my expression my needless fears at once, Mayoi-chan said, "Oh, it's not like that."

"It's not like something big happened. I just forgot something at Araragi-san's home and I want to get it back."

"Forgot something?"

"Here."

Mayoi-chan showed me her back.

At first I had thought that it was just a lovely back shot with nothing to it, but when I thought about it, it was strange for nothing to be on it in the first place. One of Mayoi-chan's charm points laid in how she always wore a backpack, anytime and anywhere.

Said backpack was gone.

What happened?

"Wait, what? What did you just say, Mayoi-chan? You forgot something at Araragi-kun's home?"

"Yes, I was taken away by him yesterday."

Mayoi-chan said, sounding troubled, with her back still facing me.

"That was when I carelessly forgot my backpack."

"Taken away...?"

"I was dragged away by him."

"...Um, that sounds even more criminal."

Asking again might escalate the 'kidnapping' into 'assault', so I didn't dare to press the matter. At any rate, Mayoi-chan had left her backpack at Araragi-kun's home.

That was quite something to leave behind.

"But, in that case, couldn't you just go to Araragi-kun's home?"

Her coordinates were completely wrong.

Why was she even here?

"I went to his house first, of course. But his bike wasn't there, so it seemed he had already left."

"Huh...? Would Araragi-kun leave for school that early...?"

I didn't like spending even one extra second in that house so I leave for school as quickly as possible, but in Araragi-kun's case, even if he did want to do that, since his sisters would refuse to let him out to the point where it could be called a sort of lenient house arrest, it would have to had been quite an important reason for him to leave his house that early in the morning --

"Or, it could be because he hadn't come back yet from last night because he **had to settle** whatever his important reason was."

So he didn't leave early.

He just didn't come back yet.

"Oh, I didn't think of that. That's just like you, Hanekawa-san. You're like a detective. That's certainly possible. There might have been some dire situation after I somehow managed to escape Araragi-san's home."

Let us ignore the disturbing part about how she "somehow managed to escape" Araragi-kun's house, which seemed pretty dire a situation itself. I got the feeling that if I pressed the matter, various regrettable facts would surface.

"Well, in any case, seeing as he probably wouldn't head straight to school right now, I'd been industriously searching for Araragi-san in an arbitrary way."

"You're not that good at looking for people, are you, Mayoi-chan?"

She was being too random.

How did she plan on finding Araragi-kun by searching like that? She wasn't just feeling her way by a rope. She didn't even have a rope to follow.

"Oh, no. I've managed to meet Hanekawa-san, so my investigative abilities are not without worth."

"You're very positive..."

"Well, not that I know whether meeting me is a stroke of luck for you, Hanekawa-san."

"Hm? Why not? You're a lucky charm in this neighbourhood, Mayoi-chan. They say that something good will definitely happen that day for anyone who sees you."

"Please don't make up any weird legends like that..."

The source was of course Araragi-kun.

He was unrivaled when it came to spreading these sorts of false rumors.

He really did have the makings of a teller of ghost stories.

"I'll tell him you're looking for him, then, if I see him at school."

"Thank you very much."

Politely bowing her head as she said this, Mayoi-chan clattered back in the direction she was walking, sweetly.

Of course, she would not have a long talk with me like she could with Araragi-kun. I felt envious of how Araragi-kun could talk and see eye-to-eye with such a cute girl, just as I was envious of how Mayoi-chan could talk endlessly with Araragi-kun.

To Araragi-kun, it might be something which comes to mind as natural.

But to me, that was far more of a miracle.

I was jealous.

"Now then! Let's meet again sometime soon, Hanekawa-san!"

Turning back once more after taking some distance, Mayoi-chan waved her hand.

I waved back at her.

"Yeah! See you later!"

"The episode between Araragi-san and I will be in the next novel!"

"It's not foreshadowing if you spell it out."

It's not even foreshadowing anymore. It's a promotion.

At the last, like how Araragi-kun would, I made a quip at Mayoi-chan.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 004

He who has suffered the aberrant is drawn to it -- so it is said.

Or, something along those lines.

Whether that means one is drawn to the abnormal, attracted to it, dragged along by it, or bowled over and overrun by it; the more you consider them the more intimately entangled each and every one of them seems to become and they turn into a disorienting chaos -- but at the very least, according to Oshino-san, it seems that once you have **encountered** an abnormality, they become easier to meet through the rest of your life.

He tells me that there is no reason behind this, but I believe I can attach one to it. It is a pragmatic reason, one that is not fantastical at all.

It may be a bad habit of mine, an excessive habit, to attach a reason to anything and everything.

But essentially, it is a matter of recollection and recognition.

Everybody has experienced a time when, as they learn some **new word**, said word seems to appear more often at random.

For example, if you were to remember the word "aspic", then as you read the newspaper or a novel, or perhaps watch the television or a film, the word would seem to come up far too often.

It is not only with words. The same phenomenon occurs with music or names.

You know what you know.

You know as much as you have known.

Knowledge is made up equally of recognition and recollection.

It is simply what you know.

In other words, once *that* has entered the circuit of recognition in your head, *that* which you have always ignored up till this point will now easily surface on

the vast river of information flowing into you every day.

Abnormalities are everywhere.

They can't be anywhere else.

It is simply a matter of whether you notice it or not.

That is exactly why the *first one* is crucial.

The first time is most important.

In Araragi-kun's case, a demon.

In Senjougahara-san's case, a crab.

In Mayoi-chan's case, a snail.

In Sengoku-chan's case, a snake.

In Kanbaru-san's case, a monkey.

In Karen-chan's case, a wasp.

And in my case -- a cat.

...Well, as for why I was suddenly talking about this, it's because that's what was right in front of me at that moment.

What was, you ask?

An -- abnormality.

"Whoa..."

Normally, someone meeting an abnormality would think thus: 'Ghosts can't possibly exist in this world', 'phantoms can't possibly exist in this world', 'what I'm looking at right now is not an abnormality' -- like that.

That's what they would think.

But right now, I was wholeheartedly thinking the complete opposite.

I was truly wishing for *that* before me to be an abnormality.

After all -- it was a tiger.

A tiger.

Right before my eyes, a tiger calmly walked.

It had stripes of yellow and black.

A tiger exactly as you would picture one to be.

I had just seen Mayoi-chan off -- as soon as I turned the corner, there the tiger was. So no, even putting it into a sentence didn't make it smack of reality at all. It carried zero sense of truth.

As it didn't smack of reality at all, it probably wasn't real.

It was probably an abnormality.

Rather, it would be troubling if it were not an abnormality, in any sense of the word -- the distance between the tiger and me was less than five meters. It was so close I could probably touch its stripes with outstretched hands. If this tiger was not an abnormality, but real -- let's say, a tiger that escaped from the zoo -- then my life would unmistakably end here.

It wasn't a distance I could make an escape from.

I would be eaten.

My life would be accepted with gratitude.

The baton of my life would be passed on.

By the way, in the same way it is said that sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic, abnormalities which have progressed too far are indistinguishable from reality.

This distinct animal stench and heavy sense of existence; both of these, while not smacking of reality, still felt realistic, and even if it wasn't real it certainly felt like a big chunk of reality standing right there, but it should be all right, as my dearly beloved newscaster hadn't said anything about tigers escaping from zoos.

`.....■■`

The tiger -- growled.

It did not purposely roar with a *gao* like the beasts you see in comics.

Stopping its feet, the tiger glared at me.

Oh boy.

Our eyes met.

Regardless of whether this tiger was real or abnormal -- meeting its eyes was a bad idea.

With a real tiger, that would of course be more than enough reason for it to pounce -- and with an abnormal tiger, just as I would recognize it, perhaps even more so, it would become aware of me. That was bad.

I immediately averted my gaze.

I removed myself from the tiger's sight.

This did not trigger the tiger to act, but even so, I could not move from this spot -- in the end, regardless of whether it was an animal or abnormal, I gave a half-cocked response.

If only I could just run for it -- why wasn't I escaping from this place?

I could be saved if I escaped.

So,

why did I not run?

"....."

I wonder how much time had passed.

It seems for times like these, expressions such as minutes seemingly turning to hours, or conversely minutes seemingly turn to no time at all, are used, but to be honest, I was not so composed as to be able to think about such things.

My mind was unexpectedly narrow.

Unable to remain in this place and yet unable to leave, I was like an abnormality myself -- and at long last, `Hmph. White.`

it said.

The tiger spoke.

Abnormality confirmed.

`Bright white -- and brazen lies.`[1]

Saying this (and not attaching any *gao* to the end of its lines, naturally) -- the four motionless feet of the tiger swayed, moving slowly, and it passed by me.

Having never seen the living being known as a tiger up close, I hadn't managed to grasp at all the scale of what was five meters before me, but when it passed close by, showing me that its torso was higher than my head, I once again realized that it was unrealistically enormous.

I probably shouldn't have turned around.

If it was willing to pass me by, I should have let it -- if it was willing to avert its gaze, that was all the more reason why mine should not seek it.

However --

White.

Bright white -- and brazen lies.

I was ensnared by what the tiger said -- and, unthinkingly, without a single precaution, I turned around.

What utter foolishness.

The lesson I learned from the first trimester, not to mention Golden Week, was practically nonexistent. I couldn't tell off Araragi-kun anymore.

No, in my case.

I did something far worse than Araragi-kun.

"...Ah."

But, fortunately --

or perhaps that would not be the case, as in fact, it was clear that that word should not be used at all --

when I turned around, nothing was there -- not the tiger, not even a cat.

It was simply a street.

The street where I went to school, the same as always.

"...Well, this is a problem."

I said this, not because the tiger had disappeared, but because I looked at the

watch on my left wrist.

It was eight-thirty.

It would appear that, for the first time since I was born, I would commit truancy.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ The original: 白くて白々しい with *shirokute* (one character for 'white') and *shirajirashii* (doubled 'white' characters, meaning 'pure white' and also 'shameless' or 'bare-faced lying').

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 005

"Listen, Senjougahara-san, listen! I ran into a tiger on the way to school today."

"Oh, is that so? By the way, Hanekawa-san, why do you think I'm obliged to hear you out in detail? You said 'listen!' but is that just how you open your statements, or are you seriously asking me?"

After the opening ceremony of the school term, as everyone was heading back to the classrooms in groups, I ran up to my classmate Senjougahara-san.

Then, I talked about what had happened this morning.

When I did that, Senjougahara-san donned a somewhat annoyed expression and gave me a downright annoyed response. However, rather than blindly refusing me,

"What is it?"

she demanded I continue.

During the summer break, the hair she had grown out to her waist had been drastically cut, and then she left for her father's family home straight away. As such, putting aside how it may seem to Araragi-kun, the short-haired Senjougahara-san was a novelty to me.

She had very fine features in the first place so any kind of hairstyle would more-or-less suit her, but thanks to her trim, that air of a 'high-class daughter' she had had during the first trimester had completely disappeared.

While it had caused some quiet controversy among the classmates (perhaps even more than when I had cut my hair) the way I see it, a high-schooler calling another a 'high-class daughter' is infinitely close to an insult, so this might have been for the better.

"You said 'tiger', Hanekawa-san? Not a cat?"

"Nope. A tiger, not a cat."

"Not a tiger-striped cat?"

"Nope. A tiger-striped tiger."

"Not a tiger-striped zebra?"

"That's just a normal zebra, I think, but no."

"Don't you think more people would like to be born under Libra if it were renamed Zebra?"

"I don't."[1]

Hmm -- Senjougahara-san nodded,

"Over here."

and pulled at my hand.

She brought me to a secluded spot.

There was still a little time before homeroom lessons began, so she wanted to get us away from the crowd -- we certainly could not talk freely when the eyes of the class were on us.

We were behind the gymnasium.

Such a description might give it a somewhat eerie atmosphere, but the management of the area around the gym had been awfully thorough ever since the great success of the girl's basketball team last year, so it was in fact an open and wholesome place.

The weather was good as well, so it was a fitting environment for the flowers of a love story to bloom, but for us, there bloomed the flowers of a ghost story.

Or perhaps the flowers would wither instead.

"You saw a tiger...? If it's true, isn't that very serious, Hanekawa-san?"

"I think so. Oh, but it's not a real tiger. It was probably an abnormality. It talked."

"That's the same thing. It makes no difference. To a normal Japanese, even a real tiger is an abnormality."

"Ah."

That was true.

As always, Senjougahara-san was unabashed in giving her own perspective.

She was unapologetically realistic.

"If someone told me the panda was some sort of specter, I would believe it."

"Hmm, I'm not so sure about that."

"Isn't a giraffe just a *rokurokubi*?"[2]

"So is a zoo like a haunted house to you?"

Perhaps, nodded Senjougahara-san.

How frank she was.

"But Hanekawa-san, you really did run into something unexpected -- though excuse me when I say that it's just like you to do something like that. A tiger, I mean. Really now. A tiger! That's just putting on airs. Crab, snail, monkey -- and Karen-san, a wasp, was it? That was the line-up we've had so far and suddenly, a tiger. Everyone had been running the same race, keeping level, watching out for one another and not rushing ahead, everything all nice and friendly, and now this. There should be a law for people who can't pick up on the mood as much as you. I hate to say it, but this might be even more wonderful than Araragi-kun and his demon."

"That sort of perspective is probably something unique to you, too..."

"Did it do anything to you?"

"No, it didn't do anything -- I think. It's just that it would be hard for me to know by myself. That's why I am asking. Is there anything strange about me right now?"

"Hmm. Well, absence is one thing, but being late wasn't like you at all, Hanekawa-san. But that's not what you mean, is it?"

"No."

"Excuse me."

Saying this, Senjougahara-san put her face close to me and looked up and down at my skin. She stared as though she were going to lick it. And far from just the skin, she examined my eyes, my nose, my eyebrows, my lips, part by part.

When she was finished with my face, she took my hand again and scrutinized my nails and even the blood vessels appearing on the back of my hand.

"...What are you doing, Senjougahara-san?"

"Making sure there's nothing strange about you."

"Really?"

"At least, that was my original plan."

"So what are you doing now?"

"Enjoying the sights."

I shook her hand off.

As forcibly as possible.

Senjougahara, with an "Ah...", looked at me with an expression of great disappointment -- well, she was probably joking.

Surprisingly, Senjougahara-san quite liked her jokes.

...I hope she was joking.

All the more after I remembered what Araragi-kun had finally told me about Kanbaru-san's preferences.

"Well?"

"It's all right. Your skin will be smooth for another ten years, at least."

"That's not what I meant."

"There's nothing, from the looks of it -- there aren't any tiger ears growing out of you, at least."

"'Tiger ears'?"

Having experienced cat ears growing out from my head, this was not something I could pass off as a joke, but the suggestion sounded so realistic a possibility that I laughed as much as I could while nonchalantly confirming the

area around my head.

Good.

Nothing was growing out.

"But encountering an abnormality doesn't mean that something abnormal will immediately happen -- so it's probably too soon to be relieved."

"That's true."

"It's not impossible for you to wake up next morning having turned into a insect."[3]

"That's a bit too much of a leap, I think."

We should at least keep it to tigers.

People might figure out that we like Kafka.

"But, in this case, I think it would be better if you were to discuss this with Araragi-kun. Of course, I was afflicted with a crab abnormality -- and suffered through much for it -- but that doesn't make me any more knowledgeable on methods to deal with them."

"Well, yes, that's true."

It was as she said.

While you might become afflicted by abnormalities, it was not something you could develop experience for.

Rather, it became more and more of a non-career the more you know of it.

Even if I discussed this with Senjougahara-san, it would only bother her. Worse, I might even end up doing what amounted to gouging at her wounds.

"But Araragi-kun is having a day off today."

"What?"

Senjougahara-san tilted her head, looking blank.

"Was he not in the line during the opening ceremony? -- I didn't even realize he was gone when he really *was* gone. That's worse than not realizing he's there when he really is."

She chuckled.

It gave me the chills.

At times, the vestiges of what Araragi-kun called her 'verbal abuse phase' would bleed out.

However, an unexpectedly large amount of poison had been drawn from her over the summer break, and it was clear that even her comments just now were jokes.

People do change.

I am happy to say that she is a true example of that.

"Well apparently, the attendance record isn't quite something to be bothered by anymore, but I wonder how my darling thinks about it?"

"Don't call him 'darling'."

That's too big a change.

People wouldn't be able to connect your character with previous appearances.

"Speaking of which, I met Mayoi-chan before the tiger this morning. From what she says, I'm guessing that he's doing -- **something**."

"'Something', you say?"

Senjougahara-san shook her head, as though to say, "My goodness".

It was a somewhat oversold, but a very clear expression of disbelief.

"I suppose that is typical of him."

"Maybe. After all, he's a man who can only see what's in front of him."

"Have you tried calling him? Or sending a message?"

"Mmm, well, I probably shouldn't."

I strongly felt that I shouldn't bother him, not when it was certain that he was **in action**. If he were at school, the first thing to do would be to discuss this with him, but the thought would occur to me whenever I wanted to call him or write a message.

It was less me being reserved and more me worrying about his safety.

"I see."

Senjougahara-san nodded.

"Though I think you should be a bit more bold."

"'Bold'?"

"Or perhaps that should be 'shameless'. That man would under no circumstances think it an annoyance to be relied upon by you. You know this much, don't you?"

"Well, I'm not so sure."

I was perplexed by Senjougahara-san's words.

"Maybe I really don't know very much about this."

"Or are you being considerate for my sake?"

"Of course not. Not at all."

"That's good."

This time, Senjougahara-san sighed.

A deep sigh.

"Well, it's not certain that something will happen. And it doesn't do much good to fret -- it does more harm than good to worry, like a *yandere*.[4] Though seeing as we can't confirm that the tiger won't attack somebody else, do you really think you have a choice besides talking to Araragi-kun? It doesn't matter if it's a tiger or a lion, because just like me, you don't have the strength to fight the abnormality itself. Like me, you too have the knowledge but not the experience. Enough to talk the talk, but still wet behind the ears."

"That's true..."

The way she worded it made it seem to carry a different meaning.

It was a complicated line, and I couldn't tell if she phrased it that way on purpose.

Araragi-kun would probably be able to see through it and make a wonderful retort.

But I didn't have the skill to do so.

"Only Araragi-kun, who keeps a vampire in his shadow, can fight abnormalities -- well, Kanbaru as well when she feels like it, but I shouldn't make her do anything unreasonable."

"Right."

I had heard about that, vaguely.

The bandages on her right arm -- right?

In that case, the problem was not reservation but something more realistic -- danger. Though her problem with the abnormality had been resolved, Kanbaru-san lived as though she was carrying a bomb at all times.

Or perhaps she herself could be called a bomb.

...Well, if I put it that way, then Araragi-kun was the same. That would be why I did not call him.

At least, I thought so.

Although I knew -- that that wasn't the reason.

Ultimately, it was as Senjougahara-san had said.

I could not bring myself to be bold when dealing with Araragi-kun.

Actually, the reason was stunningly clear --

"Hanekawa-san, have you ever said, 'help me' to Araragi-kun?"

"Huh?"

The abrupt question brought me back to reality.

It was a shock.

"What? 'Help me'...? I wonder. It's not really something that comes up in everyday conversations... probably not, I think."

"I see. Me neither."

Senjougahara-san looked up at the sky as she talked.

"After all, he saved us before we could say it -- while saying things like 'people

just get saved all by themselves' as though he heard it from somewhere."

It wasn't "as though" he heard it from somewhere, he really did hear it. That was the phrase that Oshino-san would constantly repeat.

"It wasn't just with the crab. Yes, the case with Kanbaru, with Kaiki, and many other things, he came to help me both openly and secretly. But, just because he'll save you even when you don't say anything, doesn't mean you don't *need* to say anything."

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"What I mean is, it could be that you're just expecting Araragi-kun to come save you even as you stay silent."

"...Oh."

Hmm.

Could this be seen in that way?

However, the sad truth was, that being said, I could not completely deny it.

I myself do not approach.

Instead, do I wait to be approached?

That's -- "not who I am", wasn't something I could say.

There was a darker me within myself.

Being within myself, it was closer to me than anyone else.

"I think it'd be better if you could rely on him without reserve. That's what he's always wanted. If you had done that before during Golden Week,"

Then --

As she spoke -- Senjougahara-san stopped what she was saying mid-sentence.

Perhaps she felt halfway through that she said too much.

But she did not apologize, simply looking uncomfortable -- though an apology would have been troubling as well.

I did not deserve one.

"Maybe we should head back to the classroom now."

I said.

I wasn't particularly trying to help her as she stood there awkwardly, but looking at my watch, it really was time for us to have to go back. We would have to run back up the stairs.

"We should."

Senjougahara-san nodded.

"I won't force you, but it's not good to try to do something by yourself when anything happens. You still have a strong tendency to do that -- so if you don't want to trouble Araragi-kun, then drag me into it as well, though I wouldn't be much help. At the least, you have me to die together with."

Saying these ridiculous things offhandedly, Senjougahara-san walked towards the school building. Though she had been "rehabilitated", it felt as though her, how you say, great power in this area remained in good condition.

Well.

Frankly speaking, Senjougahara-san wasn't rehabilitated so much as she had simply gotten cuter.

Especially when in front of Araragi-kun.

Araragi-kun only knew the Senjougahara-san who stood right before him, so it might take some time before he realized this.

And it's not like I was in a hurry to tell him.

Anyway.

And so, the two of us went back to the classroom together -- at worst, we were in danger of homeroom lessons having already started, but on that front we were all right.

Well, no.

Hoshina, our homeroom teacher, was already in the room.

By all rights, lessons should already have started -- but everyone, teacher and student, was pressing up against the window overlooking the grounds, and

nobody was in their seats, so this wasn't a lesson but something else.

What happened?

What were they looking at?

"Ah."

Next to me, Senjougahara-san murmured.

She was quite a bit taller than me, so she had noticed **it** before I did -- strictly speaking, by the time I realized that everyone else was looking at something, she had taken off her shoes and stood up on one of the chairs.

In contrast with her appearance, she was an unexpectedly active girl.

Not being quite so courageous, I simply walked over, weaving my way through the gaps between classmates, and gazed outside the window.

I knew instantly what they were looking at.

"...fire."

I fell in a daze, unable to think.

I talked to myself -- something I rarely did outside the house.

I watched the blazing fire, burning some place so far away that it only appeared as a speck, but roaring so loudly that the sound reached us.

And I said it.

"My house is on fire."

I called that house -- *my* house.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑

   The original: Hitagi asks Tsubasa if renaming 練馬区 Nerima-ku (a ward of Tokyo) to 縞馬区 Shimauma-ku (shima-uma meaning 'zebra') would make more people move there, the two terms being the same except for the first character, and two fairly similar-looking characters at that.

2. Jump up ↑

   A kind of youkai from Japanese folklore, tricksters in human form who could stretch their necks to great lengths.

3. Jump up ↑ A reference to *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka.
4. Jump up ↑ 気に病んでも *ki ni yandemo* means "Even if you worry/become anxious..." and shares the same pronunciation as *yandere* (which is itself derived from 病む *yamu*).

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 006

There were two things I had not known.

The first was that you could see the house I lived in from the window of the classroom where I studied every day. It wasn't as though I never had a chance to stand by the window and look outside.

Why did I not notice it?

Why did I not see it?

I *had* seen it, of course, but I did not consciously recognize it -- basically, the reversal of the logic that "he who has suffered the aberrant is drawn to it".

I think I might have pushed that house out of my own consciousness.

However, another thing I had not known was the unexpected amount of shock I would feel when that house burnt down -- I was dumbstruck.

To the point where my mind went blank.

It was a terrible blow.

It seemed Araragi-kun held the misconception that, as a human being, I had a good hold of myself -- but like others, I had my destructive impulses. Ever since we experienced that nightmarish Golden Week, he had placed too great an amount of trust in my humanity -- or no, perhaps he had unexpectedly been turning a blind eye to it -- but to be clear, I myself had wished countless times that 'a house like this should just disappear'.

But I hadn't thought that it would actually disappear.

Or that I would feel such a sense of loss when it did.

It was not affection of any sort.

I never even considered thinking of that place as *my* house -- I might have said so by accident, but that was just a self-delusion.

However, it was the unshakable truth that emotions were once attached to such a delusion.

Was that a good thing, I wonder?

I had been deluded.

Yes, that was the truth.

Or was it a bad thing?

Both seemed possible in their own ways, but at this point, it was too late for either.

After all, it had already been lost.

The house in which I had spent fifteen years, was now lost for eternity.

Disregarding the fact that I had been late, I requested that I be allowed to leave early to Hoshina who of course approved, and I ran home like Kanbaru-san in spite of myself, to find fire engines and spectators milling around the scene, the fire having already been put out.

The fire had been extinguished.

And everything was gone.

Not having spread to the neighboring houses at all, the fire burnt the house to ashes with nothing left standing.

The one silver lining in this situation would be the fact that this would be extremely advantageous when collecting our fire insurance.

It was unpleasant, but it was also the most important matter.

Wait, that's not right.

The most important matter was of course our safety -- but there was nothing to be concerned with on that front. I was at school, and it was highly unlikely for the **other two** whom I should call my parents to return home in the morning.

Of the three of us,

not a single one thought of this place as our home.

It was a place, not a home.

But I guess this means that the Rumba was burnt, and I mourned for automatic vacuum cleaner that had gallantly woken me up every morning.

I mourned for it, more so than for the house.

Now, aside from the Rumba, quite a lot of things were burnt, or rather, everything was burnt, but, well, as I was nothing more than a mere high schooler, I had not owned much in the first place, so in that regard there was no reason to be bothered.

I could say that all my clothes being burnt would be a bother, though.

Or perhaps it was the same for the ones whom I should call my father and mother -- they probably had nothing important in the house, as well.

They probably left the things important to them at their working place.

I would think so.

This house,

was not a place to leave important things in.

They would be defiled.

Well, in any case, there were many things I had not known -- and there were many things that, after the house burnt down, I realized for the first time.

Although I had not met him directly, perhaps this would be what that swindler, Kaiki Deishuu, would call a well-deserved lesson.

I didn't know.

I didn't care.

It didn't matter whether I cared or not -- the fact was that I had been cast out into the streets.

And while there were places where I had gone to during days off, not because I wanted to but because I hadn't wanted to stay in the house, it would truly be a blessing now to find a place where I could spend the night -- but in any case, thanks to this, the Hanekawa family will now have a family dialogue, something we have not had for a long time.

'Dialogue'?

No, even I can imagine that this sort of thing is not called 'dialogue' in a normal family.

It was nothing like a family meeting.

We merely exchanged our opinions.

But none of us received anything.

Naturally, many troublesome formalities resulted from our house having been just burnt down -- but as of right now, even the reason for the fire was completely unknown. Chillingly, even arson was being suspected -- this was a long-term problem, and there was nothing that a child like me could do, so what we discussed today was also the most pressing question at the moment, which was to say, 'where we were to sleep tonight'.

We had nothing like relatives on whom we could rely on living nearby, so of course, there should have been no room for discussion at all, and we ought to make our way to the nearest hotel -- but that in itself was a problem to the Hanekawa family.

The biggest problem or, you could say, the only problem.

We had not slept together in the same room for a considerably long time.

I of course slept in the hall, and even though they were husband and wife, they had separate bedrooms. A hotel room would already be quite expensive, and we would need to have a second and third --

"I'll be all right. I'll stay at a friend's place."

Before the discussion could become too involved, I said this.

I announced.

"It's a good chance for the two of you to have some alone time together, as a couple."

I said, having already understood that my doing this, not out of principle but because of how I truly felt, was due to my terrible inhumanity -- during Golden Week, I realized that this was what's wrong with me.

I did not want to spend the night in the same room as these two.

Even though I clearly understood that this was how I felt, I prioritized it as lowly as I could -- I knew, just how unnatural that was.

It was barely within the scope of humanity that I could think of this fire as a 'good chance'.

That was what Araragi-kun and Oshino-san had taught me.

That was my lesson.

Of course, I stood where I was right now, not having made the best of said lesson at all -- but I felt that I should return the two of them to how they should be.

That was the feeling I had.

It would be fine if I could just give those two one last chance before I become an adult, after which they intended to immediately divorce.

So I thought.

Taking everything into account, it would take several months to rebuild our completely burnt house, so in the few weeks until they could rent a house, with the fifteen years the two of them had had together -- things might work out.

I thought so.

It crossed my mind.

I wanted to think so.

The two consented readily.

They did not stop me from staying at a friend's place. In fact, they were clearly delighted that I suggested it myself.

But of course.

The two of them together alone was better than the three of us together alone, so perhaps they were thankful for this fire, in terms of how it got rid of a nuisance for them.

They were delighted by what I had done.

I myself must have been quite insane to have found happiness in that.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 007

But now I had a problem.

Well, I already had a problem to begin with, but now I had a bigger problem, and it was the fact that I didn't have a single friend who would let me stay with them.

I did have friends.

Having a somewhat problematic personality, I could't say I had a lot but, in my own way, I had built up a network of friends appropriate for the average student during my school life.

Speaking of which, while Araragi-kun spoke of his lack of friends with not so much masochism as something closer to pride, on this point, allow me to testify that he was not speaking untruths.

It was not an exaggeration to say that he had no friends.

Or rather, he had for a long time been conducting himself so as to make as few friends as possible -- making friends lowers your strength as a human being, or so he had said.

He had seriously thought, and said, that.

Although he had already abandoned this philosophy, he was still undergoing rehabilitation, and I had never seen him talking to the boys in class.

Actually, I had never seen him speaking to anyone other than Senjougahara-san and me.

Did he know that, just as how Senjougahara-san used to be called a 'high-class daughter', he had been called a 'motionless mute'?

Compared to Araragi-kun's situation, I still had friends.

Friends with whom I got along well with.

But, when I thought about it carefully, I had never stayed at a friend's place

before.

I had never experienced anything like 'staying over', as it was called -- hmm.

Now that I thought about it again, I wondered why this was.

Even though I hated spending time at the house, I had never genuinely attempted the act of 'running away' --

Araragi-kun would probably say something like, that's because you're an honor student, and while that might seem to be the truth, perhaps it was rather Senjougahara-san's view that was correct.

In other words,

"Have you ever said, 'help me'?"

This wasn't limited to Araragi-kun.

Perhaps seeking help from others was simply something I could not do -- I didn't like the thought of entrusting something so decisive to another person.

I didn't want to let go of my casting vote.

I wanted to define my own life myself.

That was why -- I became a cat.

I became an abnormality.

I became me.

"Well, I guess it's all right. As luck would have it, I know where to go."

To cheer myself up, I said this in a way that wasn't quite talking to myself, and set off. The only luggage I had was the bag I brought to school -- as it was the opening ceremony on the first day of the new trimester, it only contained stationery, notebooks and other such unimportant things, but right now, they were my only possessions.

This feeling of being like Anne Shirley, with my single bag containing all my fortune, meant it was untrue that I wasn't cheekily enjoying the current situation, so I suppose that, as a person, I wasn't so serious all the way through -- and the place where I was going was, of course,

the ruins of that tutorial school we all knew.

It seemed to have been called Noble Minds Tutorial School when it was still in business.

This was the place where Oshino-san and Shinobu-chan had lived for about three months -- and Araragi-kun as well during the spring break, so regardless of its ruined appearance, it should have the facilities for one person to stay for the night.

That was how I read it.

I would be thankful for a floor and a roof, at least.

It would be pretty far going on foot, but I wanted to start saving money from here on, so I did not take the bus.

In the past, Oshino-san had placed a boundary field there so you wouldn't really be able to reach it even if you wanted to, but it was removed now.

If you just walk along the route,

you should get there normally.

Naturally, there was no electricity, so I had to make my bed while the sun was still up.

Oshino-san and Araragi-kun made their beds by arranging the desks and chairs, didn't they?

In which case, I should follow their example.

Passing the fence and entering the ruins, the first thing I did was head up the stairs to the fourth floor -- I chose the fourth floor because I heard from Araragi-kun that Oshino-san often lived on that floor.

Judging from the living patterns of its previous inhabitant, I guessed that the fourth floor would be easier to live in compared to the others -- I had put everything I had in this wild stab.

Rather than hit its mark, it missed completely.

The first classroom I entered on the fourth floor had a hole in the ceiling.

The next one was lacking in floor.

No floor, and no ceiling...

And something must have happened in the last remaining classroom, as though some sort of beast had rampaged around the room -- if I had to say, it was as though Araragi-kun and Mayoi-chan were allowed to run amok as they pleased.

I felt some regret at my rashness.

It wasn't supposed to be this damaged...

When I first declared that I would stay at a friend's house, these ruins were actually already on my mind, but this might be more severe an environment than I had imagined.

Forcing a smile and trying my best to raise my spirits, I went down to the third floor -- the first classroom I entered on this floor was lacking in both ceiling and floor.

It would seem that the hole in the ceiling was connected to that classroom on the fourth floor I saw earlier -- what happened here, really? From the hue around the hole's edges, it seemed to have been destroyed very recently...

The earthquake proofing of this building would be put in quite a lot of doubt, if this had collapsed by itself.

With my heart thumping I challenged the next case and, finally, I arrived at a classroom that maintained the normal appearance of its ceiling, floor and walls.

But it was too early to feel relieved, and I immediately began working to make a bed. This feels a bit like going camping with the Scouts, I thought, but of course, I had never joined the Scouts.

Knowing something means you only know it.

It is not experience.

It was as Senjougahara-san had said.

It was as if I accumulated knowledge, and alongside it I accumulated meaninglessness.

In fact, binding the available desks together to make a bed was, despite

appearances, not a simple task. I had no rope to bind them with in the first place. I left the ruins momentarily and went to a nearby store to buy some things.

"All right, it's done. Oshino-san used one more desk for his bed, but I'm not as tall as him, so this size should be enough."

It was enjoyable, though. Making something.

I thought the bed I had created was quite a piece of work -- tempted to try it, I could not resist and laid down, still in my uniform.

"Whoa."

This wasn't going to work.

As high as my expectations had been, the mental damage I suffered was extreme.

It really wasn't going to work.

I seriously felt let down.

There was no difference between this and sleeping on the floor.

My expression became rugged.

Believing that a side-by-side test was important, I actually tried lying down on the floor, and it really didn't feel like there was much difference.

No, in fact, with the number of joints in a human body, it was harder to sleep on the desks.

What a fearsome man you were, Oshino-san.

He could probably sleep on a bed of nails.

I tried thinking of how Araragi-kun and Shinobu-chan had done it, but seeing as Shinobu-chan was a former vampire and Araragi-kun had been a vampire when he lived here, it couldn't really be used as a reference.

I hadn't the faintest idea of how a vampire would feel in sleep when they could sleep comfortably even in a narrow coffin.

"A *futon*. I need bedding..."

Saying this, I left the ruins once again.

I left, carrying my wallet which had a cash card inside -- so it wasn't as though I couldn't go and buy things.

Besides, there were many necessities which needed to be bought in the first place aside from vinyl cords, and it shouldn't take much time or effort -- it was just that, at this point, I had to cut down even on bus fares, so there was no way I could buy a something like warm *Hanege* quilt bedding, so I had to prepare some sort of replacement.

On this topic, I read in some book that newspaper, magazines or cardboard were very reasonable for the purpose of warming oneself. I ought to be able to get cardboard at department stores for free.

Considering the amount of this-and-thats which I had to buy, I would have to take the bus for the return trip, but I cleanly surrendered myself on that point. It was a bad idea to cut down on even the things I needed.

Poverty dulls the wit.

How beautiful those words were.

And that was why I walked.

I walked, slowly.

One step at a time, firmly.

Foodstuff that could be preserved, and water, things like these were absolutely necessary. I'd use cardboard as the mattress and newspapers, not magazines, for the cover. Tearing the pages would be an essential task if using magazines, and I didn't think I could manage it. Even if I were to use magazines, it seemed I had some resistance to destroying reading material. On this point, newspapers were already undone to begin with.

And clothes.

I couldn't sleep in my uniform -- apparently, Araragi-kun had begun to think that I didn't own a single piece of regular clothing, but this was not true, of course.

Those two hadn't done a single parent-like thing for me, but they weren't

negligent, either.

They did the minimum.

They did it as though they were fulfilling some obligation.

So they bought me clothes, at least -- it was simply that I didn't really want to wear them.

Well, everything had been burnt now.

After that, everything came to be nothing.

It felt as though I had been reset.

Yes -- though it was, in truth, imprudence on my part, I could not deny that I was in a brisk mood.

Of course, said feeling of briskness was also in truth a trick.

There -- had been no reset.

This situation was nothing more than a temporary refuge.

Something that was lost cannot be made into something that had never been.

Walking around the mass retailers in the department store, I saw that clothes as a product was surprisingly expensive. I would have to take the bus, but maybe I should head to Uniqlo... as I started thinking this, the neighboring hundred-yen shop suddenly came into my view.

Actually, I thought as I approached it, I already had a hunch about coming here, and I was right. Of course, you would be hard-pressed to find pajamas (-style sweaters) for a hundred yen, but thankfully, underwear was sold for that price.

I bought them without a moment's hesitation and finished up my shopping.

As I thought about stupid things like how I really couldn't show off underwear I had bought at a hundred-yen shop to Araragi-kun, I stepped onto the bus for the return trip as planned, and returned to the tutorial school.

Oshino-san hadn't spoke of bothers like these when he had lived here, but as he was a human being and not a vampire, I felt a strange sense of admiration for him as I wondered if he had really gone through three months of hardships like

this.

In the third-floor classroom, I began reinforcing the bed. Cutting the cardboard with a utility knife, I used packing tape to wrap together two layers on top of the desks. You may think that, no matter how much I worked on it, cardboard was still cardboard, but this was overwhelmingly more comfortable a bed. I wrapped another layer of cardboard just to be sure, and completed my bedding.

As the amount of work so far had tired me out considerably, I had dinner.

Preserved foods were all that I bought, so there was no need to cook anything.

Of course,

"Thanks for the meal."

I did not forget these words.

Even if it was just preserved foods, once you trace it back to its source, it had been the sacrifice of some life, somewhere.

At least that's what I believe, so, thank you.

In fact, even if it wasn't a living being, it would still become a part of my blood, and my bones, so I will accept it with gratitude.

Life is precious.

Even if it no longer lives.

However, eating this sort of food would predictably become wearisome in the end, so perhaps I would buy a portable stove and pot eventually. This was supposed to be temporary dwelling until those two found a house to rent, but they are both busy with work, so the situation might turn into one where I will live here for quite a long period of time.

"I can use the washrooms and showers at school... if it comes down to it, I can recharge my cellphone at school as well. I can study at the library or reading rooms. As for what's left..."

Going over the various things that might become problems, I continued the task of inspecting them one by one -- I immediately found measures to deal with every single problem.

It would seem that by doing this, I was not so much working out response plans due to the stress my life will be in from now on, but rather working hard to confirm that I was not troubled in any way by the burning down of that house.

I did this, as though I was adjusting myself so to fit into the current situation.

As though I was resolving a paradox.

It really was quite like me to do such a thing.

"That was delicious."

Seasonally speaking, it was still the height of the summer so the sun should set fairly late, but it had become pitch dark before I realized, so I changed into the nightclothes and the underwear I bought at the shop, and went to sleep on the bed I had just made.

'Comfortably snug' weren't quite exactly the words I could use.

Even so, it was a mysterious thing that I felt a sleep more peaceful here than when back in that hallway.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 009

Hmm?

Did we just skip a chapter?

Or was it just me?

Ah, well.

If the Rumba were still around, these ruins would certainly be worth of its sweeping, but unfortunately it had been burnt together with the house, so I could no longer rely on it to wake me up in the morning.

In spite of this, I was fairly sure that I would be able to wake up at the right time just the same as always, and made light of it.

The human body has something called a biological clock.

The bio-rhythm permeating your body cannot be so easily broken.

To say nothing of the fact that I was a person who could not understand the mindset of being 'half-awake' -- however, the reality was different.

I did not oversleep.

Rather, I woke up before the time I had planned to -- and what's more, I did not simply wake, but was woken.

There shouldn't be anyone who would wake me up now that the Rumba's gone --

"Hanekawa-san!"

I was woken by someone pulling me up.

Under my present condition, would an unbelievable sight suddenly pouring into me count as me being half-awake? -- so I blithely thought, as I waited until understanding could catch up to recognition.

As I looked at Senjougahara-san before me, holding my collar,

I thought, blithely.

"Are you all right?! Are you alive?!"

"H-Huh? Wha? G'morning?"

Still unable to understand the situation, I -- doing something I hadn't done for a really long time -- gave a morning greeting.

I was bewildered as well.

After all, that cool-headed Senjougahara-san was looking straight at me, her face bright red as tears fell.

"Are you all right?!"

Senjougahara-san repeated her question.

Still having absolutely no idea of why she was so worried,

"Y-Yeah."

I nodded.

I was crushed by her ardor.

"....."

Following this, Senjougahara-san finally let go of my collar and bit her lip, looking as though she was holding back a teary outburst, and then

"Idiot!"

she slapped me.

I was pulled up.

And I was slapped.

I might have been able to avoid it if I wanted to, but her appearance was so menacing that I simply allowed myself to be hit.

No, I really couldn't have avoided it.

My cheek burnt and stung.

"Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!"

Not ending with simply the first hit, Senjoughara-san continued to slap me --

along the way, her hand broke down from a backhand to simply beating on my chest, like that of a child throwing a tantrum.

It didn't hurt at all.

But it was so very painful.

"A... a girl! All by herself! Sleeping, in a, a place like this...! What if something had happened?!"

"...I'm sorry."

I apologized.

Well, perhaps I should say I was made to apologize -- after all, I didn't think there was any reason whatsoever to reflect on what I had done, or in other words, my little game of Scouts and the feeling that I was experiencing something rather interesting.

But, even so,

there was no mistaking that I had made Senjougahara-san, *that* Senjougahara-san, so very worried about me --

Though imprudent on my part, I was a little happy, as well.

I was happy.

"No. I won't forgive you. I'll never forgive you."

Saying this, Senjougahara-san embraced me, as though snuggling up to me, as though clinging onto me, as though throwing herself onto me.

As though she will never let go again.

"I won't forgive you. Not even if you apologize."

"Yeah... I got it. I know. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Even so, I continued to repeat these words of apology.

I embraced her in return,

and continued to apologize.

In the end, it took about thirty minutes for Senjougahara-san to stop crying and by then, it was my wake-up time, just the same as always.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 010

"I called you many, many times last night."

Senjougahara-san said, having gone back to her usual, cool-beauty self as if nothing had happened. The speed of the switch was worthy of my astonishment. Even so, the area around her eyes was still bright red, so she hadn't relaxed completely yet.

On the other hand, it seemed that I tossed around quite a bit in my sleep and messed up my hair, probably because of the bed (I got called a 'Super Hanekawan') so I suppose I didn't look completely relaxed, either.

I just thought it was incredible how Senjougahara-san managed to act normally, as though the flood of tears from before were just a pretence.

Really, she was just so adorable.

It almost made me not mind the state my hair was in.

"I couldn't even imagine how it would feel to have your home burn down... I'd thought that maybe you wouldn't want anyone talking to you right now, so I had been holding back, but I was still worried... so I made up my mind and decided to go ahead and call you anyway, but it wouldn't go through."

"Oh. Sorry, I turned my phone off."

I said.

"I thought the living would be rough from here on, so I ought to be more frugal."

I wasn't using the phone in place of my alarm clock because I had some trust in my own biological clock, but of course, there was also a more pragmatic reason.

I couldn't be completely sure whether the school would let me use their outlets or not (my teacher would lend me one if I explained the reason, but ultimately, the use of cellphones was banned in school).

"My goodness, you are strait-laced... you can just borrow the outlets here and there."

"Well, that's actually called theft."

"I had to run all over the city, thanks to you. I managed to learn that you were staying at a friend's house after asking a lot of different people -- but no one told me who in the class you were staying with."

"How... how many people?"

"Everyone I knew."

"....."

To Senjougahara-san, who once upon a time had risen beyond a mere fear of strangers and reached the epitome of human distrust, this was a growth.

However, due to said growth, the news of my disappearance was now known to the class...

Well, great.

"Also, I'm sorry. I met your parents as well."

"Huh?"

That was a surprise.

Does that mean she went to visit the hotel they were staying in?

Well, I guess anyone with the patience and the connections would be able to find them..... they weren't exactly in hiding, and they had a postal address.

In fact, Senjougahara-san probably visited them, assuming that I was following th-- that I was there.

"I see. So, you met... Father, and Mother."

"You've never actually called those people 'Father' and 'Mother', have you?"

Senjougahara-san said nonchalantly.

Even more nonchalantly than usual.

She seemed displeased.

In the past, you wouldn't be able to tell what she was thinking at all just by reading her expression, but emotions have been appearing on her face lately.

Joy, and sorrow.

And anger.

...It would seem that she had quite received quite the reception.

Things would be so much easier if those two could just improve on their external display -- Oshino-san also got a pretty horrible reception during Golden Week -- but I wonder if I were one to talk when I myself couldn't think of anything decent to say in the current situation.

I just couldn't follow up on things like that.

"It seems much has happened. Not that I mean to pry."

Unlike Araragi-kun, she knew very little about my situation, the discord and distortion of the Hanekawa family, but seemingly with no intention of becoming too deeply involved, she briskly returned our conversation onto its original course.

A show of skill from the Senjougahara-san I knew.

I remembered why I admired her.

"After that, I started looking around at random, and finally, I thought of this place just as it became morning. Well, I thought of this place from the very beginning, but I didn't even want to consider a girl of your age spending the night in a ruin like this... but maybe, just maybe, I searched this place last."

"Huh. Huh? Wait, are you saying you stayed up the whole night, Senjougahara-san?"

"I *am* saying I stayed up the whole night, Senjougahara-san. Staying up all night, what they call 'stay-upper' for short."

That's why I got so excited when I found you and started crying, said Senjougahara-san.

That's a cute excuse.

'Staying up all night' is an 'all-nighter', by the way.

"....A girl of your age wandering around the streets at night sounds plenty dangerous to me."

"I don't have any way to answer that."

I'm not really the thinking-ahead type, said Senjougahara-san.

Now that I looked, she was wearing jeans and a T-shirt, a very rough style. The way she was covered in sweat told me that, rather than 'wandering', she had been running about like Kanbaru-san.

"Thanks."

I thanked her shortly, and as nonchalantly as possible, and then lowered myself from the bed.

It didn't hurt.

I didn't believe myself to be an excellent human being, no matter how much Araragi-kun might tell me so, but it would seem that I had some talent at bed making.

I fancied myself becoming, perhaps, a bed maker in the future.

Can you learn it by studying in Germany or something?

"It's all right, it was something I decided to do by myself -- and judging from your situation, it seems I've done something rather fruitless."

"Of course not. Not that you've mentioned it, I finally realized just how dangerous this was. They say fire can drive anyone into a panic, so it looks like that fire got me in a pretty strange mood."

"Perhaps. In fact, I hope that is the case -- you do some incredibly dangerous things even just naturally, did you know that?"

"Really?"

"Seducing Araragi-kun, for one."

"Hmph."

A 'hmph' was all I managed.

I couldn't figure out a rebuttal.

I haven't been trying to seduce him at all, and yet I couldn't object.

This theory, that I had been the one who made him the way he was now, was surprisingly persistent among the public.

"He really was very aloof back then... when he first got involved with me. There's barely any trace of that left now."

"*Is* it... because of me?"

"Well, there was the matter of the tiger, as well... in any case, I certainly did worry too much. I apologize, I should have known better. Now, let's go."

"Go? Go where? To school?"

"My home."

Senjougahara-san said this as though it were obvious.

"I will say this one more time for your sake, but if you attempt to resist, a stapler will be going into your mouth, and it will close shut around the side of your neck. Anything to bring you with me, Hanekawa-san."

"....."

Seeing as that was apparently what she actually did to Araragi-kun a long time ago, there really was no way for me to go against what she said.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 011

In spite of what the occupant herself had said, the outside appearance of the apartment where Senjougahara-san lived, Warren Villa, was spectacular to the point where you would think it were a pre-war building. It felt the very image of venerability.

Araragi-kun had once said, mean-spiritedly, that in terms of earthquake proofing, this place was more dangerous than those ruins (though I think that might have just been his way of expressing his concern for Senjougahara-san) but as I went up the external staircase, I found that this was not the case, and it was more soundly built than I expected.

Perhaps this is what is meant when people say older buildings are sturdier than recent, instant-made structures.

Even the security of the place was incomparable.

There was a lock on the door!

...Now that I'd come to an actual house, I realize just how much risky those ruins were.

It was dangerous.

"Father has work today and won't be coming back, so stay here for today, Hanekawa-san."

"Oh... can I?"

"Um, actually, Father isn't coming home tonight..."

"Why did you need to rephrase it like we're in some sort of romantic comedy?"

Senjougahara-san had a rather nuanced sense of humor, both before and after her rehabilitation.

Room 201.

Taking off my shoes, I excused myself inside.

She really didn't have a hallway.

It was a neat 12x9 room -- there wasn't any kind of furniture except for bookshelves and chests of drawers. It seemed possible that they had tried to fit with the room's openness by not having much furniture, but, well, Senjougahara-san didn't seem like the type of person who would have many things in any case. I was sure that her father was the same.

"Despite appearances, I used to live in a manor -- back then, I could have let you have an entire room without batting an eye, but this is the best I can do for now."

"Don't say it like Lupin."[1]

"What would you think if I told you that I went around to different convenience stores and spent a total of 90,000 yen because I wanted to win Lupin's Fiat in *Ichiban Kuji* that badly?"[2]

"I would think you have horrible luck."

I sat down.

And looked around the room.

"This place makes me feel calm, in a way."

"Is that so? Araragi-kun always seems very ill at ease, though."

"I doubt there's a boy out there who can keep his cool in a girl's room... but it's, well, nice here."

Unable to summarize my thoughts, I simply said these things as they occurred to me.

"It feels like home."

"Oh?"

Senjoughara-san put on a face, as though she didn't really understand.

She probably didn't.

It was natural, as neither did I.

Even though I was the one who said it.

As though talking to myself.

What was "home" in the first place? -- I certainly had lived for fifteen years in the Hanekawa house that was now gone, so of course, to argue the case logically, that was "home" by definition, and, as I myself had said when I saw it burning, it was "my house".

But still.

Why was it that I felt more calm in this Room 201 than in the hallway of that house?

Why did my heart feel at ease here?

"At the very least, I don't feel that it's my house. After all, it hasn't been that long since I moved here."

Senjougahara-san said.

"Well, of course, my previous home is gone as well."

"....."

Of course.

The house where Senjougahara-san had lived -- the house that had been known to my entire neighborhood, that truly justified the use of the word "manor", was now an empty plot of land.

No, it wasn't even that.

Wasn't it just -- a road, now?

I wonder.

I had clearly watched my own house burn, even if it was from a distance -- how did it feel, for one's home to become something of the past?

I didn't know.

I didn't know -- so I stopped thinking about it.

Yes.

I wouldn't be bothered by it anymore.

I wouldn't be bothered by my own calmness.

"Take a break from school today, Hanekawa-san."

Senjougahara-san said, taking off her sweat-drenched T-shirt.

Saying this as one girl to another, she put on an extremely good show when she, well, stripped.

It was worth admiring, even.

"I'll be resting as well."

"Huh?"

"I'm tired. Naturally."

Now that I looked closely, Senjougahara-san's eyes were rather bleary.

"I could fall into the embrace of my bed right about now."

"....."

That was quite an expression to use.

"I may be a former member of the track and field team, but it's been too long. My legs are shaking. And you, Hanekawa-san, it looked like you made your bed well, but there's no way you could have slept well in a place like that."

"Well, that's true, maybe."

"And your hair looks horrible."

"Please don't talk about my hair."

Flustered, I turned to face Senjougahara-san.

"But it's only the second day of the second semester, taking a break now..."

"You don't think it's abnormal for someone whose house just burnt down to mosey down to school the next day like nothing happened? 'Insensitive' is the word people use to describe people who think like you."

Taking off her jeans, Senjougahara-san said this strictly, facing me in her underwear.

Her stance told me that she would stubbornly refuse any disagreement.

Though she was wearing so little, no one could appear more valiant.

And no one could appear more sensual.

"Besides, you're not planning on studying further, yes? Then there's no reason to care about your attendance or student records anymore."

"Well, that's true, but..."

But they're *rules*.

I wanted to obey them.

Because they're *rules*.

"My goodness, just rest. If you must go to school, then you'll have to defeat me first."

Saying this, Senjougahara-san took on a stance from Chinese martial arts.

A needlessly perfect Praying Mantis.

"Shiiing."

"Please don't add in your own sound effects... all right, I get it. I'll do as you say for today, Senjougahara-san. And to be honest, I really do want to rest and relax. Thank you for making me do this."

"If you say so."

Besides, minding other people's business like this isn't like me -- Senjougahara-san said, somewhat embarrassingly, but I wonder. Personally, I thought this sort of officiousness was just like her.

"Oh. Oh, but, is it all right for you to take a break, too?"

"Me? Well, as for me, I plan to go on to university based on recommendations. Regardless of my attendance record, damaging my student record would be -- hmm, that's right."

Senjougahara-san seemingly worried for an instant, then immediately took out her cellphone. Just as I wondered who she was calling, Senjougahara-san pinched her nose, faked a hoarse voice,

"Cough, cough, oh, Sir? This is... cough, this is Senjougahara. I've caught the flu, it seems... it might be the newest strain. Cough, yes? My temperature? It's averaging at forty-two degrees. I just broke my air conditioner with my fever.

There's no mistake, this is because of the heat wave this year. I'm swimming in sweat. I feel like I'm coming apart... I might infect the whole class, but can I come to school? No? Oh, is that so, I understand. How unfortunate. I really wanted to hear your lesson. Well then -- "

said this, and ended the call.

And, as though nothing happened,

"We're good."

she said this.

We were *not* good. At all.

"'The flu'...? Why did you have to lie about that? What's wrong with just a cold?"

"The bigger the lie, the harder it is to expose. It's all right. There's a doctor who I've known for a long time now, I can have him fake a doctor's note."

"There's no way he'll help you with that."

What kind of doctor would put his own career at risk for the sake of a high schooler and her sickout?

Senjougahara-san was good at telling lies, and yet she wasn't.

"And can you please put some clothes back on now? It's really a bit awkward if you keep wearing nothing but that."

"Hm? But I'm going to take a shower now."

"Oh, I see."

"Aren't you going to, too?"

"Oh. Yes, please let me borrow your shower."

Now that she mentioned it, I felt like I was completely covered in dust.

And I sweat a fair bit in my sleep, so the underwear I bought at the shop were in quite the sorry state as well.

The size felt a bit wrong in the first place.

"But, you first, of course."

"Why are you being so reserved? Let's go in together."

After my suggestion, she said this invitingly.

And with a great smile, too.

One that I doubt even Araragi-kun had seen before, a smile that shone like the sun.

"We're both girls, there's nothing to be embarrassed about."

"No, wait, stop for a second. Actually, just stop. That sounds a little inappropriate."

"Oh, Hanekawa-san, it's not like I have ulterior motives. Or do you not trust your friend?"

"If the friend could say something like that in a situation like this, then maybe..."

"Don't mistake me. I'm not like Kanbaru."

Senjougahara-san said this with a serious expression.

"I just want to see you naked. Nothing more."

"....."

It seemed new character traits were being added to Senjougahara-san.

I had previously heard about Kanbaru-san's preferences, but now I wonder about relationship of the Valhalla Combo when they were in middle school, and how it was perhaps not just a one-sided affair.

"Please, Hanekawa-san, take a shower with me!"

This Senjougahara-san was just too new a character.

Who would be able to follow this?

"If we work together, we can defeat Sengoku-chan!"

"Didn't the story already establish that you don't know about her yet...?"

And now metafictional remarks.

I should be more careful.

Just like how I should be more careful of Senjougahara-san.

"...Well, all right. We're both girls, after all, so I don't really mind that much."

"Oh. I'm surprised you'd agree."

Senjougahara-san returned to her usual self.

"I might have been the one who invited you, but I would have thought that you were the sort of person who would have a line you'd never cross, even with a friend."

"Ahaha, a line? What? Like someone who never lets anyone into her room, or never plays with anyone outside of school, people like that?"

"Yes."

"I won't deny that."

I had lines, too.

Perhaps you could say that I disliked others rudely intruding on my affairs despite my doing the same in return -- my relationship with Araragi-kun was exactly like that.

And why it ended up like this.

"But there's no reason to keep my distance and act aloof to someone who just slapped me while crying her eyes out."

"Hmph."

Senjoughara-san's face became red.

She pouted, as though she was sulking.

She had been beautiful when she was expressionless as well, but this Senjougahara-san, her face filled with expressions, was also very beautiful.

So much so that maybe I should be the one asking her to shower with *me* -- or would that be going too far?

"Ah."

It was then that the phone in Senjougahara-san's hand rang. I thought that perhaps Hoshina did realize how unnatural Senjougahara-san had sounded and

called to ask again, but that was apparently not the case.

It was the ring tone for a new message, anyway.

"Who is it from?"

"Araragi-kun. Hmm. From the contents, I think you'll be getting the same thing."

"Huh?"

"Why don't you check? You can just use the outlet there. Don't worry, I won't ask you to pay for it."

"Adding that last part actually makes you sound really petty..."

Saying this, I took my cellphone out from my bag and plugged it in. Without waiting for it to ring by itself, I checked my mailbox.

You have -- 957 New Messages.

"Oh, don't mind those, I sent those because I was worried."

"You sent 956 messages in one night?!"

Over half of the messages in my Received folder seemed to have been pushed out and was gone from the memory.

Was this supposed to be my fault?

Shouldn't I be asking for an apology for this?

As I thought this, I hurried to check the latest message -- it really was sent by Araragi-kun.

'not comingback yet dont worry'

There was neither a subject nor a signature -- the message was so bare, calling it 'straightforward' would be an exaggeration. It was urgent, as though he was wrote it in such an emergency that he didn't even want to waste time with capitals, punctuating properly, or fixing the spacing.

"Perhaps this is to be expected, but it seems Araragi-kun is at it again -- and this time, it appears to be quite serious."

Senjougahara-san, having apparently received the same message, said this

mixed with a sigh.

She seemed astounded, even.

"I don't really know what happened then, but judging from the message, this sounds as bad as spring break, or worse."

"You think so too?"

"Yes. Well, at least he took the time to send a message this time, so perhaps he has grown... back then, he really couldn't see anything except what was in front of him."

"That's true."

Did it -- have something to do with Mayoi-chan?

Well, Mayoi-chan was only looking to have her backpack returned, and that was the only reason why she was looking for Araragi-kun, so she should be unrelated to what Araragi-kun was involved in right now --

But, for some reason, I knew that was the case.

And somehow, with absolute certainty.

"It's no good. It wouldn't connect."

At some point, Senjougahara-san tried to call him (and with so little hesitation in the act as well) and, with almost no hint of having done something audacious, she snapped shut her cellphone and put it in its charging stand.

"Well, he's a boy, so I suppose we don't have to worry for him... it should be all right. Once he comes back, I'll brag to him about taking a shower together with you."

"I don't think he'd be bothered by that."

"Hanekawa-san's body curves like this here, it goes like this there..."

"Stop gesturing."

It wasn't indecent so much as it was sultry.

"But, this would mean that we have to deal with the tiger ourselves."

"The tiger?"

The tiger -- the one I saw when I went to school.

The giant tiger.

The talking tiger.

Speaking of which, that was the reason that Senjougahara-san said made her worry too much --

"But the tiger -- "

"Hm? I'd wondered if that tiger wasn't the cause of the fire... was I wrong? Is the cause clear?"

"No, we still don't know -- "

It -- might have been arson.

That was what the firefighters had said --

But the tiger -- could it be the reason --

" -- we don't know."

"I see. Then it seems I should have put one foot in front of the other. As a track and field team member would."

"Please don't waste such a posed look on a joke of this level."

"Now, Hanekawa-san, it's time. We should have our shower, for him as well."

"I don't think we need to do this *for* him."

"I will be looking at your nude body for him."

"Please just do that for yourself."

"Very well."

Senjougahara-san promptly consented.

Well, I wouldn't know what to do even had she resisted.

"Ah, yes, now that I actually think about it, Araragi-kun can no longer feel excitement from a naked girl or her underwear."

"Really?"

"Yes. He's levelled up after the experiences of these few months. As he tells

me, just the act of wearing a skirt is erotic."

"From that point of view, there really is no way for a girl to protect her body."

"Oh man, just look at those hemlines waving in the wind, he says."

"So he doesn't even need to look inside them anymore, huh..."

That *was* high-level.

Or, just...

Yeah...

"Well then, let's help wash each other's breasts."

"You mean help wash each other's *backs*, right?"

"Hanekawa-san."

Thinking that it wouldn't be good to stretch the conversation out any further, I hurriedly began taking off my uniform, but Senjougahara-san suddenly asked me a question.

With a face that was neither smiling nor serious.

"Do you still like Araragi-kun?"

"Yes. I still do."

I answered her immediately.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ 今はこれが精一杯 *ima wa kore ga seiippai* ("This is all/the best I can do for now.") is a well-known line from *Lupin the Third: The Castle of Cagliostro*.
2. Jump up ↑ *Ichiban Kuji* is a sort of lottery where you buy a ticket (which generally costs 800 yen or less) to win prizes great and small.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 012

Now would be a good time to talk a little about Araragi-kun.

The story of Araragi Koyomi.

The story of Araragi Koyomi, Senjougahara-san's boyfriend, and my friend.

I knew *about* Araragi-kun since before spring break, actually -- I don't know everything, but I knew about Araragi-kun.

It seemed that he did not realize this himself, but he was quite the celebrity at Naoetsu High School.

He not only stood out.

Frankly, he looked like he stood in a police line-up.

He would always be eager to treat me as a celebrity, but Araragi-kun himself looked to be in much the same situation.

Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he was feared.

Yes, feared.

Just as I disliked being treated as an honor student, he disliked being treated as a delinquent, but, well, if there was a student who took days off as he pleased, attended classes and took tests half-heartedly, at times not taking them at all, then I couldn't possibly be the only one who thought of him in that way.

After we became friends and I asked him, or rather, casually investigated about the details, it would seem that, in terms of what Araragi-kun did when blowing off school or neglecting classes and tests, it was pretty much the same as what he did during spring break or Golden Week.

He became a vampire during spring break as though it was nothing. His life did not change completely because he became involved with the abnormalities, but rather, he had been Araragi Koyomi all along.

Even the acts of the Fire Sisters, Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan, of which he

would bitterly complain about while wearing a terrible expression, were similarly treated as though they were nothing, nothing more than a rehash of his own time in middle school.

No, from what those two tell me, when he had been in middle school Araragi-kun was much more dangerous. His extracurricular activities brushed against laws. No, it wasn't even an exaggeration to say that he fought against those laws directly. I could hardly believe he managed to live to become a high schooler, and my amazement evolved into admiration.

Although it did seem to be true that, while Araragi-kun had done much the same thing in both middle school and high school, there was a great difference in the source of his motivation.

What happened? On this point, he had obstinately refused to talk about it ever since spring break, and currently none of his friends, including me, knew, but it would seem that Araragi-kun had some sort of mental turning point when he was in the first year of high school.

You could say it was the reason why he "became a failure", as he would put it.

...He exaggerated it on purpose, so perhaps it was nothing more than the fact that he stopped studying. There was no law stating that a person's mentality could only change with great incidents.

Whether he intended on changing or not, Araragi-kun was still Araragi-kun.

Even if the aloof Araragi-kun I first met had been the result of said change, he was still himself.

Regardless of how much he changed, he was still Araragi Koyomi.

So this was simply reminiscing on when Araragi-kun had been a middle schooler, when he had been more excitable, more active and hot-blooded -- something that he himself had already forgotten. In this way, perhaps him becoming a high schooler and settling down was something normal.

Everything he did.

Was just.

Normal.

Or perhaps,

Spring break, and Golden Week,

And the cases with Senjougahara-san, with Hachikuji-chan, with Kanbaru-san, with Sengoku-chan, with Karen-chan, perhaps these were, to him, inconsiderable compared to what he had experienced in middle school.

And even now, on this very day, he was still acting on something.

At some point, I fell in love with him -- when, exactly, would be a story for another time.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 014

.....?

Did we just skip another chapter?

What's going on?

It couldn't have been that we skipped the number 13 due to its ominousness. In the past, Araragi-kun had said that he understood the sort of inevitability regarding skipping the number "13", but he wondered just how influential the person who first came upon the idea of skipping "4" due to its association with "death" - and then spread this bit of wordplay around - must have been and subsequently tilted his head (which in itself was a fitting perspective for him)[1] but that didn't mean "13" must be skipped simply because it felt inevitable.

???

Well, it wasn't particularly inconvenient, so let's just move on -- anyway, it was past noon by the time I awoke.

No one woke me up.

As Senjougahara-san had said, I did feel like I slept more peacefully here than I had at those ruins, a quiet and deep sleep feeling like it eased away the layers of fatigue wrapped around my soul.

Well, I was a little surprised at waking up and seeing Senjougahara-san's sleeping face, though.

No, not just a little. I was honestly quite shocked.

It could only be called a spectacle.

Her features were terribly fine -- it seemed that when a beautiful person shut their eyes, they carried an almost entirely different air in contrast.

In particular, Senjougahara-san's face as she slept looked so smooth, so delicate that it were as though she had been crafted - as though she were made

from porcelain - and yet, she was undeniably bewitching in a way impossible for a work of art, so that even I couldn't help but feel my heart race.

Thump-thump.

My physical fatigue was gone, and I couldn't possibly stay half-awake after having my blood pressure raised so precipitously, and so soon after opening my eyes.

So Araragi-kun always got to see this sleeping face all for himself, huh.

With just the slightest bit of adult content entering my mind, my face reddened all by itself.

I was acting like an idiot.

I was *being* an idiot.

.....Or perhaps that was wrong.

Not even Araragi-kun could have a monopoly on this, not yet -- Senjougahara-san lived with her father, after all.

The one who had seen his daughter's sleeping face more than anyone else.

The one who watched over her more than anyone else.

It could only be her father.

"...Well."

Oh.

Suddenly, Senjougahara-san opened her eyes.

It felt not so much like "waking" as "coming back to life".

Or perhaps "being switched on".

Being activated.

It seemed Senjougahara-san was also not the type to stay "half-awake" -- even though you might think from her appearance that she suffered from low blood pressure.

Well, apparently there was no relation between low blood pressure and waking up in the morning, anyway.

If I had to suggest something, then perhaps low blood sugar would be related.

"Good morning, Hanekawa-san."

"Good morning, Senjougahara-san."

"Well, so we say, but it's probably not the time for that anymore."

"That's true. It's not."

"What time is it?"

"Umm,"

Turning my head, I once again checked the clock placed above the chest of drawers.

"One-thirty."

"In the morning? Or afternoon?"

"Afternoon, of course."

How long were you planning on sleeping?

Begin flashback -- and after that.

After that, Senjougahara-san and I really did take a shower together -- I will simply report now that various embarrassing, awkward things happened, as it was my first time experiencing a shower with anybody else.

As such, the initiative was completely held by Senjougahara-san, who actually did wash me here and there. She seemed very used to it, and they were clearly the skilled hands of someone experienced in the act.

She was used to playing around with girls!

That's what it made me think.

I couldn't sit still and do nothing after having that much done to me, though, so I started washing her back here and there.

In the bathroom that was not quite big enough, we were literally, completely open with one another. I'm not sure how I should express it, but I certainly feel like I've crossed a line.

If I had been facing a line, I certainly did cross it.

You could also say it was a turning point.

At the very least, there was no longer any particular reasons to hold back when I was with Senjougahara-san, or so it felt. Truthfully, I had been forcibly brought here by her, and still felt some resistance to the idea of staying at someone's home.

But after being taken care of for just one day, I managed to think such things so honestly.

That was the feeling I got.

I honestly thought that.

Speaking of which, that was something I had not done for quite a long time.

What does it mean to be honest?

What does it mean to think?

It would just end up in incoherent rambling if I consider it too deeply.

Though now that I thought about it, Senjougahara-san was also the kind of person who built firm walls around her heart.

Back when she had been mistakenly called a 'high-class daughter', she would never have done anything like letting me stay at her place or taking a shower with me, let alone running around the city in search of me in the first place.

I thought of the various things she must have overcome these few months, the weight behind them.

How pathetic I must be that I should experience various things myself and yet, in the end, overcome not a single thing.

Yes.

I had not -- overcome anything.

Even after the turmoil of Golden Week, or the day before the Cultural Festival.

I hadn't grown at all.

I hadn't changed.

That's why I was so very envious of Senjougahara-san -- and yet so very fond of

her, and could never come to hate her.

I honestly thought that.

After playing around in the shower for about thirty minutes (no one was there to stop us) we left the changing room feeling refreshed.

We wiped ourselves dry and put on our underwear.

"Of course, I assume you'll be reluctant to try on my underwear, but at least take my pajamas."

Senjougahara-san said.

"I'll just go and throw out those dreadful discount-shop sweats. Those designs would make even a chorten choke."[2]

"Huh? Are they that bad?"

"Terrible."

Senjougahara-san shook her head, seemingly irritated by her dripping hair.

It was a very frank comment.

"Clothes like that weren't made under the assumption that people would wear them... they're for mannequins. Or to confirm the functionality of a coat hanger, perhaps."

"....."

Was it that bad?

As there had been no mirrors in the ruins, I never had a chance to check how I looked in those clothes... but perhaps part of what made Senjougahara-san cry when she saw me sleeping in my self-made bed was because of I was sleeping in those clothes.

Hmm.

Well, that's not good.

"But, can I? Borrow your pajamas, I mean."

"It's all right. I have quite the wardrobe."

"In that case, thank you."

I took out fresh underwear from the ones I bought at the shop.

After that, I put on the sleepwear taken from Senjougahara-san's chest of drawers.

It was a strange sensation, wearing someone else's clothes -- there was a sense of openness distinct from the act of wearing clothes.

It felt as though something had been permitted.

Though, as Senjougahara-san was tall and her clothes size bigger than mine, it felt looser than it needed to be.

"But of course, the area around your bust looks uncomfortably tight. Wonderful."

"No, it's not really that tight..."

It's just sleepwear. That's normal.

It's not a matter of course.

After waiting for Senjougahara-san to put on her pajamas, we dried each other's hair.

That didn't take long -- though we had fairly long hair in the first semester, by now the both of us were at the length of bob cuts.

We were soon dry.

It made me feel as though something was missing.

"But Hanekawa-san, ever since you cut your hair after the Cultural Festival, you've been growing it out again, haven't you?"

"Hm? Oh, yeah. I haven't been to a salon since then."

"Are you letting it grow again?"

"Mmn -- I don't really know. I only really noticed after I cut it, but I didn't realize how much time it took to look after it if you keep it so long -- don't you think so?"

"Hmm. Well, you have a point, I suppose."

"Right?"

"Like when you wake up."

"...Right."

She's not letting go of that one, huh.

"So I've been wondering if it's all right to let it grow after graduating -- or something."

"After graduation, hmm."

Senjougahara-san repeated my words in a meaningful tone.

"To be honest, I'm still not sure what to think of that. I certainly don't believe that you *need* tertiary education, but it isn't as though university is just a place for studying. As I see it, travelling around the world and going to a university are the same thing."

"....."

This had been brought up as a topic of conversation many times now, but it made me think that, really, it's because she could say things like this so clearly that I liked Senjougahara-san.

Yes, I wouldn't be going to university.

That was why I didn't need to worry about my attendance or student records.

I was set on travelling around the world for about two years once I graduate -- most of the planning was already done. Arranging too detailed a schedule would make it feel like a package tour, so I made a straightforward plan through-and-through.

At this point, only Araragi-kun and Senjougahara-san knew about this "future course" of mine.

The way he was, Araragi-kun did not attempt to stop me.

The way she was, Senjougahara-san was quietly in complete opposition.

"Seeing the way you could sleep in those ruins without a care just makes me oppose this even more. Even more resolute, you could say. You do realize that not every country is safe like Japan, don't you? By the time anything happens, it would be too late, you know. All the men in the world would be after your skin."

"My skin?"

"Just imagining your skin being sunburnt as you wander the tropics makes me truly feel despair."

Senjougahara-san's face was one of true despair.

Just why was she so attached to my skin?

"Really, perhaps I should just put a collar on you and confine you to a locked cage..."

"Senjougahara-san, Senjougahara-san. You're suggesting doing horrible things to me in this safe country."

"Aren't you just being stubborn?"

Senjougahara-san ignored my retort.

Speaking of which, Araragi-kun told me that she would also ignore many of his comebacks.

Maybe she's just an airhead.

"Not that I would know who you are doing this against: Araragi-kun, Oshino-san, perhaps me -- or someone else. Those parents of yours, for example."

"....."

That shut me up for a bit.

It made me think.

Perhaps that was true -- no. No it's not.

"I'm not being stubborn. I wouldn't decide my own future based on my own stubbornness."

"Really. If you say so."

"I just want something that can cover for what I don't have enough of -- oh, yes, as people like to say these days, a journey to discover myself."

"To discover yourself."

"Of course, I already met 'myself' during Golden Week -- so maybe it would be more correct to say 'a journey to create myself' and find a new me."

"Hmm. Well, I doubt I could overturn a decision you firmly swore to yourself. I may be resolute, but you are obstinate. However,"

Senjougahara-san said.

Quietly.

"If you ever feel like not going, you can stop anytime you want. You can turn back even in the middle of your journey. We would never think it shameful. Yes, 'we'. It's obvious that even Araragi-kun really does want to stop you."

"Does he?"

"Absolutely."

I was talked down.

But I wonder.

I didn't quite entirely know how Araragi-kun felt about me -- anyway, we finished drying our hair in the course of this not-really-a-girl-talk.

Senjougahara-san then took out one set of bedding from the closet.

"There is one more set, for Father, but I don't know about that. I guess a high school girl would be reluctant to sleep in the beddings usually used by a middle-aged man in his forties. Yes, there's no choice, sleep together with me, Hanekawa-san."

"....."

Now that was some snap decision.

"It's all right, it's all right, really! Don't worry! I won't do anything at all! We're only sleeping together! I won't lay a finger on you!"

It took quite some skill, the way she was able to appeal for trust and lose it at the same time.

"I won't treat you like a hugging pillow!"

"...I think I get why you go out with Araragi-kun now."

The suspicion that it was possibly Senjougahara-san, and not me, who made Araragi-kun the way he is now quickly surfaced in my mind.

And when I really thought about it, back during spring break, I remember that Araragi-kun was comparatively similar.

Yeah, it's not my fault, then.

"Okay, I get it. I wouldn't have worried even if you hadn't said anything."

"Is that so? Thank you."

Senjougahara-san thanked me for some reason.

She was a girl who ranked unnaturally high on the suspicion scale.

"Well, then use my pillow, Hanekawa-san. I'll use Father's."

"Huh? Oh, right, why can't you just use your father's beddings, then?"

At her age, a daughter would clearly feel some rejection towards her father, even if they're family, or no, *because* they're family, so she wouldn't want to use the same beddings as him -- was the reason I had thought of, but that didn't seem to be the case, not when she was fine with using his pillow.

"What? But if I use Father's beddings, I wouldn't be able to sleep with you, now would I?"

"I see."

It was an extraordinarily logical reason.

Very difficult for me to undermine.

"And since I'm actually in love with Father, if I actually try using his bedding I'll be too aroused to sleep."

"You're baring too much to me."

What kind of family was this?

Well -- as I had absolutely no idea of what a 'family' was, that wasn't a joke I could make at a moment's notice.

"At any rate, every house has its own sort of familial relationship -- Araragi-kun and his sisters, for instance. Isn't their relationship clearly abnormal?"

"Yeah, it is!"

Without a thought, I enthusiastically agreed.

Plainly put, the relationship between those siblings was dangerous.

It was something that had been in constant conflict with all logic, and worse, it recently began moving towards a total victory.

The situation was extremely perilous.

"I was introduced to Karen-san and Tsukihi-san the other day, and the amount of respect in their eyes when they look at their brother... compared to that, my feelings for Father are well within range of 'normal'."

"Hmm."

There was an undeniable sense that she brought up an even worse example to normalize herself, but let's not press the issue.

Having lived in the same house, spent fifteen years together with those two, and yet unable to become a family with them in the end -- it wasn't something that I should press on.

Even that house,

was gone now.

Without a house -- we could not become a family.

"Now, shall we go to bed? *Hanege*... no, Hanekawa-san."

"It's not actually possible to mispronounce 'Hanekawa' as 'Hanege', you know."

The only common point was the part in the beginning, and the words were vocalized differently. It couldn't have been an accident, but ever since Senjougahara-san's expressions became more varied, it became wholly impossible to know how serious she was being just by her appearance.

The time was 8 A.M.

We could still make it to school in time if we made a dash for it now, but I meekly reported to Hoshina my intent to be absent.

I tucked myself into bed with Senjougahara-san.

"Good night."

"Good night."

Bidding each other a good night.

I hadn't done this in a fairly long time either, and it felt as though it were the first time I said it at all. I would say 'good morning' to Rumba, of course.. But I couldn't say 'good night'.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ Possibly a reference to his name *Koyomi*, meaning "calendar", and how the number thirteen is regarding as 'outside' the calendar.
2. Jump up ↑ The original: 卒塔婆が卒倒しそう *sotoba ga sottou shisou* (like it can make a stupa collapse/swoon), a pun on the first two similar characters

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 015

End flashback.

"1:30 in the afternoon... that was quite a long sleep. Did you just wake up, Hanekawa-san?"

"Yep. Pretty much."

"Heheh, who would have ever thought that I'd wake up in the same bed as Hanekawa-san?"

"Please don't make it sound like some kind of pillow talk."

"I'm quite sensitive normally so I usually sleep light, but I slept very well today. I wonder why? Maybe it was because of my pillow."

"By that, do you mean your father's pillow? Or your new hugging pillow?"

Not that either choice boded well.

But I wasn't one to talk, seeing as I myself slept so well that I didn't dream at all. Was Senjougahara-san's pillow that comfortable? Or was it her bedding? Or was it my new hugging pillow...

No no.

No hugging. Not me.

"Now then. Are you hungry, Hanekawa-san? I was thinking of making breakfast... or rather, lunch."

"Oh, that's a good idea. I'll help."

"Is there anything you don't like to eat?"

"Nothing, no."

"Okay."

Senjougahara-san crawled out of the bed and headed to the dressing room. She probably wanted to hold the kitchen knife only when she had washed her

face and was completely awake.

She came back out, and went into the kitchen.

I say 'kitchen', but given the size of the house, it was basically the same room.

"Hm-hm-hmm."

Senjougahara-san hummed a tune as she put on her apron.

She was in a good mood, for some reason.

Perhaps she liked cooking.

I remembered that Araragi-kun had previously lamented the lack of home cooking on the part of Senjougahara-san, but speaking of which, I hadn't heard anything like that recently. I wondered if that meant he had had an opportunity to taste his girlfriend's cooking.

"Hanekawa-san,"

"What is it?"

"If I started slowly reducing myself to a naked apron right now, would you go *moe*?"

"I would snap."

Is that so, Senjougahara-san nodded, and began taking out food items from the refrigerator.

It seems we can settle this without aggravation.

As I didn't really know how to snap at someone, that was rather helpful.

"By the way, Hanekawa-san, did you know that you write *moyashi* with the same character as *moe*? Ever since knowing that, I can't help but find eating sprouts delicious."

"Um, no, I don't think the taste of something will change just for that..."

"So, well?"

Senjougahara-san turned to face me with a strikingly posed look.

Sticking the tip of the kitchen knife at me.

"Is it not, in fact, high praise to call someone a 'sprout'?!"[1]

"A 'sprout'..."

To be honest, I didn't think it was that interesting, but with a kitchen knife waving in my face, I couldn't make any unwise objections.

But she did look really fitting with a knife, didsn't she?

"Which do you like better, Hanekawa-san? *Koshihikari* or *Sasanishiki*?"[2]

"I guess it's already decided that we're having rice, huh."

"We call it 'morning rice', 'afternoon rice' and 'evening rice', after all. We would call it 'morning bread', 'afternoon bread' and 'evening bread' if it were bread."[3]

"That sounds pretty neat..."

But we could just refer to them normally as 'breakfast', 'lunch' and 'dinner'.[4]

Senjougahara-san's theory seemed to have quite a few holes.

"Hmm, yes. That you end up reading 'evening bread' as 'tablet' would be one such hole."[5]

"No, there are bigger holes than that."

"So does your house always have *Koshihikari* and *Sasanishiki*?"

"Of course not. We only have mystery rice."

"'Mystery' rice?"

"Well, the word 'mystery' does include 'rice', doesn't it?"[6]

"So what?"

"So, maybe it's not 'branded' rice, but 'blended' rice."[7]

"That gag is about fifteen years too late."

There had been a time when various problems concerning rice blends and brands had been the main topic of gossips.

Of course, said problems weren't gone so much as they simply were no longer a popular topic.[8]

"It's all right. Father is rather particular when it comes to rice cookers. It's quite expensive, you know. Doesn't it look like it doesn't fit with the rest of this kitchen?"

"Mmn,"

That's true.

I wondered why she felt the need about pointing this out, but it certainly seemed to have cost more than the monthly rent for this flat.

The rice cooker of the Hanekawa house was quite advanced in years, so I was secretly looking forward to it.

"Do you cook, Hanekawa-san?""

"Yeah, I do."

Answering too directly would involve the situation of the Hanekawa family and cause discomfort in others, so it was troubling just how much detail I should to reveal, but seeing as I was here by her leave, I thought I ought to clarify to a certain extent.

In addition, Senjougahara-san had already met the ones whom I should call my parents, so there was no point in keeping up appearances on purpose. Besides, I've talked with her about sleeping in the hallway before --

No.

It wasn't about what I should say, or whether there was a point or not.

I simply wanted to talk about it normally, with Senjougahara-san.

I didn't want to hide anything from Senjougahara-san, who had been so worried about me.

"I make everything I eat."

"I see."

I suppose there had been a period of time like that for me as well, said Senjougahara-san.

"I didn't get along well with Mother, after all."

"...They, divorced, right?"

"Yes. I haven't met her since -- I wonder what she's doing now. Hopefully, she's happy."

Despite the topic, her tone was not one of great concern -- the knife cutting the vegetables showed no sign of stopping.

I couldn't say if that was natural or unnatural.

"Well, every house has its own story."

"That's true."

Perhaps she had carefully calculated it, but just as the rice cooker sounded that the rice was finished, Senjougahara-san turned off the stove, and started serving food for two from the pot.

I asked her if there was anything she needed help with, but she refused, asking me to let her finish. She didn't want me to interrupt her pace, apparently.

After that, we lined up the tableware along the coffee table -- I shared her load, of course.

"Thanks for the meal."

"Thanks for the meal."

Rice, soup and stir-fried vegetables with chicken.

It made me curiously happy that she didn't attempt anything fancy and simply cooked daily dishes, but explaining that feeling would take a fair amount of effort, so I didn't say anything to Senjougahara-san.

I started eating.

"Oh, it's great."

"Really?"

Senjougahara-san appeared shocked.

"Araragi-kun never seems very happy with it. To be honest, I was expecting condemnation."

"Condemnation...?"

So Araragi-kun isn't happy with this...?

Hmm.

He really didn't spend enough time with girls.

Even if it wasn't something he liked, he should have at least pretended to be happy.

Though I suppose this was also like him.

"I think it's delicious. Though I guess there are personal differences in taste."

"So that would mean you and I have similar tastes. In food, and in men."

The soup spewed out of my mouth.

Terrible, terrible manners.

"Senjougahara-san... you really are baring too much with me..."

"Oh, no, I thought maybe we should talk about these kinds of things as well. So that we can really open our hearts to one another."

"One wrong move, and the trench between us would get even deeper..."

A challenger, she was.[9]

Well, I felt glad as well that she would step up to me like that -- it was difficult for me to step into her business.

"Well, in that case, Senjougahara-san, why don't we just go all-out and talk about what we like about Araragi-kun?"

"No. If we did that, even in the unlikely event that this conversation ever leaves this room, it's quite likely that he'll get too cocky. So we shouldn't."

"I see..."

Senjougahara-san was strict when it came to her boyfriend.

She had no intention of praising him, apparently.

"Then, what should we talk about?"

"Yes, well, let's talk about what we don't like about Araragi-kun."

"That's more like it!"

After that, we spent the next three hours in a lively discussion.

I got so excited bad-mouthing someone...

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ もやし *moyashi* means "sprout", and もやしっこ *moyashikko* describes a child who is frail or weak.
2. Jump up ↑ Two popular varieties of rice.
3. Jump up ↑

   Japanese has various terms for meals but all essentially referring to the same things, one set being 朝ご飯/昼ご飯/夕ご飯 which literally mean 'morning/afternoon/evening rice'. Hitagi puts a spin on this with 朝ブレード/昼ブレード/夕ブレード 'morning/afternoon/evening bread'.

4. Jump up ↑

   Here, Tsubasa counters that they could just call them, more generically, 朝食/昼食/夕食 'morning/afternoon/evening meal'.

5. Jump up ↑

   夕ブレード 'evening bread' and 夕ブレート 'tablet' are very similar when written.

6. Jump up ↑ The character 謎 'mystery' has a 米 'rice' in it.
7. Jump up ↑

   Again, two terms (ブランド米 and ブレンド米) that are very similar when written.

8. Jump up ↑ A reference to 90s Japan when *Koshihikari* and *Sasanishiki* were considered the 'two champions' of rice for their quality and popularity. Nowadays, *Sasanishiki* has declined and is grown in limited amounts whereas *Koshihikari* is exceedingly widespread.
9. Jump up ↑

   A reference by Tsubasa to Challenger Deep, following on her 'trench' (ie. the Mariana Trench) comment from the previous line.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 016

"Well, it's almost time to prepare for dinner. It's time we talked about how things will go from now on."

Senjougahara-san ended our current topic of discussion, seemingly with regret, as though announcing the end of a party.

For some reason, it felt as though both of us were rejuvenated.

We were positively glowing.

What did we feel such a sense of unity?

"By which you mean?"

"I mean, what you will do from now on, Hanekawa-san? Even if you stay for tonight, what will you do starting from tomorrow? Do you have a plan?"

"I --"

If I were to say, "Oh, right, I'll go back to that tutorial school then" now, even as a joke, I would probably be hit again. Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if I was kicked.

"-- have no idea."

"I see."

Senjougahara-san nodded solemnly.

Her expression was so very serious, it was almost impossible to think it was coming from the girl who up till now had been wholeheartedly criticizing her own boyfriend's wrongdoings.

It had been said that she had a wealth of expressions now, but this made her seem more like a two-faced character.

"To be honest, I want you to stay here starting from tomorrow... putting you under my control would be most preferable."

"'Control'?"

"Observation."

"That rewording doesn't really help..."

There didn't seem to be much difference between the two.

Well, what she wanted to say was, essentially, that she was worried. She was probably just being honest.

"But, as you can see, our home is quite cramped -- Father will be back tomorrow, and I of course can't have you sleeping and changing in the same room as him."

"Well, of course."

That would be rather questionable.

And it would be an unbelievable bother to her father for a classmate of his daughter to sleep in the same room.

"What if Father falls in love with you? That would be terrible."

"Is that what you're worried about?"

"The day might come when I would have to call you 'Mother'."

"No. No, it won't."

"And why is that? Are you saying Father's not good enough for you?"

Senjougahara-san glared at me rather seriously.

What a troubling personality to deal with.

It would seem that she really did love her father.

Hmm.

Due to this point -- actually, even putting this point aside -- I couldn't have her allow my staying here after tomorrow.

But then, what should I do?

"Well, we can make it work for a day or two. I'll have Father go outside when we change."

"I can't make someone else's father do that..."

What kind of guest would I be if I did?

"By the way, Hanekawa-san, what do you think will happen with your family now?"

"I doubt they,"

Thinking it no longer necessary to force myself to call them 'Father' and 'Mother' in front of Senjougahara-san, I chose to express it using 'they'.

"I doubt they'll be living in a hotel forever, so they'll probably rent a house nearby. That would be most economical. We still have our fire insurance, so until the new house gets built with that money, they'll rent some place to live."

"How much will the builders need, I wonder?"

"If it's the same style of house, then probably about 30 million yen."

"No, not how much money. I meant how much time."

"Oh."

That was an embarrassing mistake.

I thought of money first.

"Mmmn, it'll depend on how they build it, but with all the formalities, it'll probably take around six months."

"Six months..."

In other words, said Senjougahara-san.

"You'll have graduated and be travelling the world by then."

" -- That's true."

It -- wouldn't be built in time.

I still did not know what exactly it would or wouldn't be in time for, though. Not yet.

The house I had lived in for fifteen years had been burnt to the ground -- by the time it would be rebuilt, it would just be another home.

I had lost everything.

That's all there was to it.

It was not a matter of whether it would be built in time or not -- in the end, it was just bad timing.

"Well, putting that aside, it's certain that you will have a place to sleep if they manage to rent a place quickly enough, correct?"

"Yep. Well, it'll still be just the hallway, though."

"The hallway? Oh. Right."

From her reaction, it would seem that Senjougahara-san had forgotten what I'd told her before.

But that was all her reaction amounted to.

"Well, there's always something -- in a home, I mean."

"Yes. There's always something."

"In that case,"

Senjougahara-san suddenly reached out, took her cellphone from its charging stand, and displayed the calender.

"The problem is where you will stay until they find a place to rent -- were your textbooks and notebooks burnt as well?"

"Yep."

I nodded.

"The only things I managed to save were the stationery and wallet I brought with me that day. I can probably borrow the textbooks from the teachers if I ask, though."

"I see. So there's no need to worry on that front."

As she spoke, Senjougahara-san did something on her cellphone with one hand -- I couldn't see what exactly it was from my angle, but judging by how quickly she was hitting the keys, she was probably not looking at the calendar anymore.

Was she typing a message?

"I have a good idea, Hanekawa-san. Would you like to hear it?"

"A good idea?"

"A scheme, even. I'm Hitagi the Schemer. A crossover you can only dream of from across universes."[1]

"....."

She called it a crossover, but it was simply a lifting of elements from other works.

"It'll probably be a week before your parents can find a place to rent -- well, we can probably manage that."

"Hmm."

To be honest about how I felt, this plan or scheme or whatever didn't seem too attractive -- if I had to find a place to stay, even if worst came to worst, I still just had to visit the hotel those two were staying at, and everything would be settled.

Ultimately, it was just a problem of my own selfishness, and not something that Senjougahara-san needed to rack her brain and be anxious about.

That was why the actual details of the idea were of little importance.

I was happy that Senjougahara-san would consider all this for me,

"I want to hear about it. Please tell me."

and I said this.

"Oh, I don't know if I should. Maybe I will, maybe I won't."

"....."

After her rehabilitation, Senjougahara-san's frank personality had become slightly annoying.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ *Hisakushi Hitagi* ("Hitagi the Schemer") is a reference to *Kizakushi Togame* ("Togame the Strategist"), the heroine from *Katanagatari*.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 017

After that, they had dinner (for posterity, they had bread, for some reason. The kitchen didn't only have a rice cooker, but a bread maker too. Apparently, the bread is a side dish to rice for them.), took a shower together again, washed themselves and, to restore their energy for the next day, Senjougahara Hitagi and Hanekawa Tsubasa fell asleep before ten.

And that's *my* cue to wake up nyan.

Me, I am as you all know a *nyew* abnormality based on the Hindering Cat, the one that annyoying Aloha nyamed 'Black Hanekawa' nyan.

Steathily, without making a sound, I slipped out of bed (unlike vacuum cleaners, moving without a sound is a cat's speciality nyan)

"Nnngh, nyaaaa!"

and stretched.

I'm guessing everyone's already figured it out so I probably don't need to explain, but when my mistress Hanekawa Tsubasa sleeps, the chapters jump because it's my turn on-stage nyan.

I'm just an abnyormality so I don't really get it, but thanks to the knyow-how from Mistress, I knyow that sleeping doesn't mean just resting the body, but resting the mind nyan -- I'm nyot exactly the thinking type, and stuff like 'spirituality' doesn't mean much of anything to me, so I don't really knyow, but apparently, that 'thinking' thing living beings do can be a pretty big load nyan.

That's why humans spend a third of every single day, a third of their entire lives, in the act of sleeping nyaa.

Everyone sleeps.

Even Mistress sleeps.

But this time, this 'sleeping' just isn't enyough rest for her mind nyaa -- it's

hard to say just how much Mistress realizes herself, I mean, I'm stupid and even *I* knyow, Mistress is really just too slow when it comes to her own 'pain', so slow that she might as well nyot feel it at all, but seeing the house she's lived in for fifteen years burn down had a terrible impact on her mind, which is to say, her soul nyaa.

That's why I'm out and about right nyow.

The third appearance of Black Hanekawa nyaa.

I guess with Golden Week, and then that time just before the Cultural Festival (what's that nyah?), this is my third appearance nyan.

Anyway, you could say the me during Golden Week, the me before the Cultural Festival, and the me right are different things nyan -- or as humans like to say, different people nyaa.

Or should that be different cats nyaa?

Anyway, just like how I can't tell different humans apart, to a human the contrast between each different appearances of the Hindering Cat -- of Black Hanekawa just isn't something they need to identify me, nyot when we're all pretty much the same nyaa.

The point is, if we put it in terms of articles, we'd only ever use an 'a', and never a 'the'. Maybe it's easier if I say we just don't have a plural form.

If a human sees three monsters, they're nyot Monster A, Monster B and Monster C, just 'monsters'.[1]

So I'm nyot Hanekawa C, but I'm nyot Hanekawa 3 either -- I'm just Black Hanekawa nyan.

Hope y'all can keep that in mind.

"Nyan-nyan-nyaaan."

I said this and headed to the changing room.

And then I looked at the mirror.

Hair transformed to pure white.

Cat ears growing out from my head.

Big, round cat eyes.

When I first 'awoke' in the ruins of that tutorial school, there hadn't been a mirror nyan, and all I could do was try to figure out what was going on (and though I totally trust Mistress, even without looking in the mirror, with those sweats, I could tell something's nyot right with her fashion sense) and when I 'awoke' this morning, I was still pretty sleepy and didn't do a thing, but cats are nyocturnyal, my brain just doesn't work when the sun's up nyaa.

So basically, this is the first time I've looked into a mirror nyan.

"Mmmmn. Cat ears really give a different look with short hair nyan."

I washed my face while looking over these very important things.

People in this country used to say that a cat washing its face brings rain the next day, but this is totally unrelated nyaa.

I left the changing room and took the key on top of the wardrobe. Of course, it's the key to the front door nyaa.

That shady human bastard Araragi Koyomi probably thought before that I'm so stupid I can't even use a key, but let me tell you nyaa, that's just a load of crap, I do *too* knyow use a key. Don't look down on us humanyoid abnyormalities nyaa.

Moving stealthily -- stealthily so that I don't wake up this Senjougahara Hitagi, who's some kind of friend to Mistress -- I silently opened the door, and just as silently locked it again.

Well, I say 'friend' nyah, but she's supposed to Mistress' enemy. It's probably weird for me to be so careful around her, then, but nyah, I'm just following Mistress' wishes.

At least Mistress,

has never hated this woman.

Nyot even once.

Nyan.

I didn't put on any shoes.

It's hard to move in those things nyan.

I'd like to keep using my toes, thank you nyaa.

"Nyan-nyan-nyan-nyaan."

By the way, there're probably some people worrying that, since I'm out and about when Mistress is sleeping, doesn't that mean she isn't resting at all?

Thanks for the concern nyan.

But it's all right.

It's fine nyan.

I'm the **balancer** to Mistress' mind, so to speak nyan -- basically, it actually heals Mistress' mind when I'm 'out', even when I'm doing nyathing in particular nyan.

And it's nyot a problem at all physically because this isn't tiring. I'm an abnyormality, so even when I use a human body, I move the flesh using totally different principles, so Mistress' body is probably more restful right nyow than it is when she sleeps nyan.

Besides, think about this for a second.

Nyo matter how good Mistress is at making beds, there's nyo way you can sleep well on a desk in a bundle of cardboard without aching all over -- that thing isn't a bed, it's just a hair-messer-upper nyah. And it's all very nice and touching to sleep in the same bed as a friend who would cry for you, which granted is miles better than what she was sleeping in before, but it's pretty nyormal to nyot sleep well with a nyew bed and pillow nyah.

The fact that that didn't happen and Mistress is getting her 'refreshing' and healthy beauty sleep is, and I don't mean to brag, all thanks to me nyan.

I'm the incarnyation of Mistress' stress, in other words, the symbol of her 'tiredness', so by *cutting me away* like this, Mistress herself should get some peace and quiet nyan.

And even if that's nyot getting all the facts right, the fact that Mistress doesn't knyow what being 'half-awake' means is at least all thanks to me nyan.

That human bastard compared me to a nightmare, but I don't knyow if that's a coincidence or he's really that sharp nyan -- I'm like 'sleep' itself to Mistress.

Her dreams nyan.

But, well, when that's nyot enyough to cover it, then like Golden Week, I'll just go around and use my Energy Drain on whatever humans I can find -- but don't worry nyaa.

I'm nyot going to be doing anything so over-the-top this time.

There's nyo point nyaa.

Besides, like that human bastard says, the way I appear like this, I'm like the after-effects of the abnyormality, the echo of it -- in the end, I'm just a phenyomenyon and nyathing else.

Like el Niñyo. Or is that El Niñyaa?

There's nyot much I can do nyaa.

Just, make sure she doesn't get any nightmares.

I can't do much except come out like this nyan.

This is the best I can do to take care of Mistress' mental side of things -- that's pretty much the same as doing nyathing, though.

But nyaa, like Aloha says, 'every abnyormality has its fitting reasons', so maybe, even if I'm just an echo, just a hallucinyation, I still do have some meaning nyan.

Well, you can't do what you can't do.

I'll just do what I can.

As much as I can nyaa.

.....Hmmm.

Looking at it like this, the me right nyow and the me from before really are different -- I don't feel like making things work out or forcing things to get solved at all nyaa.

Looks like I've gotten soft, if I do say so myself.

But cats are soft, obviously.

Nyah, that's nyot right.

Mistress is the one who's gotten soft.

We say 'abnyormalities' and 'humans', but ultimately, Mistress and I are the same being, so if Mistress softens up, then I'll curl up and sleep, too.

I don't need to wait for winter.

Don't even need a *kotatsu* to sleep under nyaa.

Mistress has thought a lot about that Senjougahara Hitagi and her 'rebirth', and gets really excited about having that Araragi Koyomi bastard reborn (she got teased for her 'rehab program' nyan) but even Mistress has been reborn, I think, compared to before.

Maybe nyot 'reborn', but 'restructured' nyaa?

I can watch Mistress from within, from inside her heart -- I knyow this well about her nyaa.

But you know how her family situation is nyaa.

It'd probably be weirder if she hadn't started going off in the wrong direction nyaa.

It's just like Mistress for her wrong directions to lead to being an honyor student -- though she's dropped her act as an honyor student, too, cutting her hair and taking off her glasses.

There's been a lot of opinions about that from people around her, but to me, it's nyathing but a good thing nyan.

I agree with Senjougahara Hitagi there nyaa.

I'll completely disappear one day.

Disappear, gone.

This is a transition period nyaa -- where Mistress is being completed nyaa.

You could say that something like me is just a delusion of puberty.

Nyo matter how long you wait until you go out to discover the world, by the time you do come back,

everyone forgets the imaginyary friend they made up when they were kids nyan.

Well, it'd be a lie to say it's nyot a bit lonely, but this has been my role since the very beginning, and I won't go against the flow nyan.

With every meeting comes a parting.

Abnyormalities are just the same.

I just have to do what I can --

"Nyan-nyan -- this way nyan?"

I didn't go down the stairs, but leapt onto the roof of this apartment, Warren Villa, and carefully watched everything in a complete circle around me.

"Nyo -- this way."

Well.

If you ask me why I got out of bed and left the room -- what I was doing if I wasn't trying to Energy Drain someone, then, nyaa, a walk at night, I guess nyan?

When I 'came out' in the ruins, and this morning, this sort of 'action' is really what I should've been doing right away, but even I need some time to prepare nyaa.

But nyow.

"Mmn. Mmmmn. There we go nyah."

It didn't take long for me to find my *target* -- as soon as I did, without a sound, I flew.

Yeah, cats can fly nyan.

Nya, that's a lie.

But the jumping power of Black Hanekawa can overcome mountains nyan -- though this time I'll be careful and nyot to make a sound.

If I really seriously jumped, the apartment under my feet would collapse nyaa.

Still, this is enyough for jumping five hundred meters nyan.

There's nyo need to keep quiet after coming this far nyaa, so I landed with a boom, crashing straight through into the asphalt.

It was a road, with nyot a single car passing by in the night.

And right in front of me,

was a tiger nyan.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ The "monster" referred to here is the *Shiro-uneri*, a type of youkai depicted by 18th century artist Toriyama Sekien as an old rag which takes the shape of a dragon.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 018

`A Hindering Cat... no, you are not. You are not a Hindering Cat. Yet you can be nothing else. You... what are you?`

The Tiger -- the tiger so unrealistically gigantic, just looking at it messes with your sense of depth -- watched me and cocked its head, looking curious.

It's a pretty rare thing to see, a tiger cocking its head nyan.

Makes me want to take a picture and upload it to my blog nyan.

"That's nyot totally wrong nyan -- actually, a small part of me is different, and my basis is different, but, well, I'm nyot *that* different."

I tried to appeal to it in a friendly way, and smiled as much as I could when I said this,

`Is that so? You seem utterly different to me -- `

but the Tiger nyarrowed its eyes and its expression didn't change.

Hmmn.

It's nyo good to judge abnormalities based on what you see, but it looks like we're nyot building a good relationship with our first impressions nyaa.

` -- The Hindering Cat, as I know it, is a meager abnormality with no sense of existence, at times there and at times not. But you -- `

"Well -- I can't argue with that nyan."

I didn't bother making a case against it.

A Hindering Cat doesn't usually have a physical form nyaa. It's probably more correct to call it a ghost story than an actual abnyormality -- and besides, even if that's nyot the case, from *this* thing's point of view, most abnyormalities probably look like they don't really exist and sort of drift in and out.

I don't need to point out that the tiger is a holy beast[1]

"There's a lot of different stuff, y'know. Even stuff like me."

`I see.`

The tiger nodded.

Nyot interested nyan.

Like something like me just isn't worth its time nyan.

`Well, something like you is hardly worth my time.`

It actually said it.

That's just annyoying nyan.

`Yet I must demand your purpose. As the same kind of abnormality, you must know the meaning of obstructing my path.`

"The 'same kind'?"

This time, I cocked my head.

Me and it, we should have totally different origins as abnyormalities -- oh, that's nyot what it means.

Just, the same type of animal.

Cat and tiger -- that's probably what it means nyaa.

Right, right.

"Well,"

I said.

"Of course I knyow nyaa -- I'm nyot going to get in your way. Last thing on my mind nyan. I'm nyot really the thinking type, but I knyow my place nyaa."

`You certainly are not the thinking type -- the doubt remains whether you understand your own position.`

This tiger is being really rude.

But it sure talks a lot for nyot being a humanyoid abnyormality nyaa.

That actually makes me feel more uneasy.

`Well, then why do you stand there?`

"I'm just here to annyounce something nyaa -- I don't care why you came to this city, or why you're here nyow. You should just do what you want, do whatever it is you're meant to do. Whatever *that*'s supposed to be, well, that's nyot worth my time. That's just how we abnyormalities are. But,"

I said.

It shouldn't be called an annyouncement.

It should be called a declaration of war nyan.

"If you try to hurt Mistress more than you *already have* -- I'll kill you."

`...I see.`

It accepted my words.

The Tiger - silently nodded in consent.

Digesting my words.

Chewing them over - really biting into the meat.

It nodded.

`I thought I recognized you from somewhere... you. You are *her*. So you -- are you possessing that girl?`

"I'm nyot possessing her nyan -- maybe if I'm a real Hindering Cat. But I'm pretty much her."

The Tiger finyally remembered who I am, nyo, who Mistress is, and I explained a bit. If I don't explain it nyow, it wouldn't understand nyaa -- even that specialist, that Aloha bastard doesn't knyow everything.

Nyo one knyows the truth about abnyormalities.

"We became the same, nyo, it's better to say we became one. I am Mistress, and Mistress is me -- she's the myain personyality, of course, but I actually have the initiative sometimes. Because I'm the part that myakes up her mind's fundamental, primeval basis nyaa."

`Hmph. That means nothing to me.`

The Tiger said it again.

I don't care if I'm liked or nyot, but I do want it to pay more attention to me nyan.

`An abnormality that supports a human. That is -- hardly rare. However, an abnormality like you should understand it best. The special trait of the abnormality cannot be repressed. *It is the problem of the one who saw.*`

"....."

`That "Mistress" of yours saw me -- that is all that matters.`

The Tiger said,

and -- glared at me.

I jumped in an instant nyan.

I thought, this is going bad -- it felt like we were going to go straight into a fight.

The tiger is terrifyingly violent -- terrifyingly short-tempered --

So I jumped.

I jumped,

and flew.

I didn't just take a step backwards, but did something much bigger, a full-power jump -- like really flying, like really overcoming mountains.

But,

after five minutes of flight time, I made a rolling landing outside the city, and right in front of me, who knows how it manyaged to get ahead of me --

It was the Tiger.

`Futile.`

"....."

`All futile. She -- that girl saw me. That is the only crucial point, that is the only important point. I -- *have already begun*.`

If my words were a declaration of war,

then the Tiger's was like an ultimatum.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑

   In reference to the importance of tigers in various Asian mythologies and folklores.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 019

"Could you wipe your feet before coming in?"

When I got back to the flat, Senjougahara Hitagi was there waiting for me with a wet towel nyan.

I erased my presence and made sure to open the lock without making a sound, but it looks like she was already awake before that.

"I'm a good riser. I am quite sensitive, after all. I said that before, didn't I?"

"...Nyot to me, you didn't."

"But you *are* Hanekawa-san, aren't you?"

"Here", and she held up the towel at me, like it was an obvious thing to do.

I just took it without complaint.

I wiped the bottom of my feet like she told me to. I didn't really nyotice it, but I see what she means nyow, because the towel became totally black, so my feet must have gotten pretty dirty nyaa.

"Well, this would be my first time meeting you... Black Hanekawa-san, was it?"

"That works nyaa."

"I see."

This time, Senjougahara Hitagi held out an empty hand at me.

"...? What do you want nyaa?"

"Well, this is our first meeting, I thought we ought to shake hands."

I almost couldn't believe what I was hearing, so I explained.

"My special trait as a Hindering Cat is an Energy Drain that's permanently active. I just have to touch someone to absorb their energy -- there's nyo way we're shaking hands nyan."

"'Energy Drain'. I've heard of that before."

Senjougahara Hitagi said plainly.

"But you won't absorb everything if we just touch for an instant, right? So we can shake hands, at least."

"....."

I tried to say something -- and gave up.

Doesn't seem like I can get her to quit nyo matter what I say.

So I didn't say anything, and just held her hand -- just for an instant nyaa.

"Uu,"

And, for that instant, Senjougahara Hitagi gave a moan -- and did nyathing else.

The sense of fatigue assaulting her right nyow should be enough to drop her to her knees, but she doesn't look like she was even in pain.

My Energy Drain isn't powerful enyough to make her faint in an instant, of course, but still, it's nyot something that a nyormal human can stand -- nyot only that, but I even shook her hand nyaa.

I guess you can say this isn't how I imagined it.

But still, this is probably how Mistress felt -- a sort of feeling like, 'just as I expected' nyan.

Just as I expected.

This girl is, just as I expected.

"....."

Well.

It's nyot like I -- and of course, nyot like Mistress --

wanted to see her suffer and in pain.

But I feel a tugging at my heart from somewhere when I see nyo reaction from her at all.

Pressing on, she

"Nice to meet you. And please, take care."

said this. With a smile, in fact.

"Take care of Hanekawa-san."

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 020

.....

Why?

This time, we jumped three chapters in one go.

What happened while I was sleeping...?

Was everything all right?

Nothing was happening while I slept, right?

"Good morning, Hanekawa-san."

As I laid completely still in utter confusion, Senjougahara-san, who was right in front of me, said this.

Oh, I thought.

Senjougahara-san, in stark contrast with the day before, looked like she was in a daze -- or, rather than dazed or sleepy, she simply looked completely exhausted --

But what kind of condition would cause you to feel tired immediately after waking up?

It wasn't as though she had her energy drained by the Hindering Cat.

"You wake up quite early, Hanekawa-san... it's still six in the morning."

"Yeah -- "

I did actually rely on my biological clock to wake up today -- even though Senjougahara-san lived closer to school than I had, so I really could have slept in for a bit.

Well, there's no loss in waking up early.

"But you're up too, Senjougahara-san."

"I go for a jog in the morning."

Senjougahara-san said, slowing raising herself.

"I have to work quite hard to maintain this figure, you know... my body turns everything I eat into meat."

"Turns everything to meat...?"

Was that some sort of euphemism for getting fat easily?

Well, it seemed that there had been some unique circumstances regarding Senjougahara-san's weight at some point in the past, so conversely, perhaps she truly was sensitive when it came to controlling that part of herself.

She wasn't even a model, so to be honest, I thought Senjougahara-san would look more charming if she put on a little more weight.

There's no need to have arms or legs that slender, was there?

It's almost scary to see them, as though you could snap them apart.

"I'm so jealous of how your body turns everything you eat into bosom..."

"Turns everything to bosom...?"

What kind of constitution did that?

I went through quite a lot myself, too, you know.

Girls have it tough.

Senjougahara-san washed her face, changed into short pants and a T-shirt, and then started doing pre-run stretches.

Wow...

She's so, *soft*...

It made me doubt my own eyes.

The movements of Senjougahara-san's body were so smooth and slick, they looked like overdone CG.

Amazing. It's like she's some kind of mollusca.

"Sorry, but can I touch you, just a bit?"

"What? My right breast? Or my left breast?"

"No, your back..."

"My right shoulderblade? Or my left shoulderblade?"

"I don't have any specific fetishes like that..."

She really was good at comebacks.

That's something I couldn't do.

Thinking this, I circled around to Senjougahara-san's back, and pushed down on her as she spread her legs into a 180-degree split.

Her body pressed onto the floor snugly.

Zero resistance, and zero friction.

There had been no need to push her down at all.

"How can you be so flexible...? Isn't there something wrong with the range of your joints? Actually, it's more like your joints are disconnected to begin with..."

"Mmmn, I just really like stretching... in a masochistic way."

"Why did you need to add the second part?"

"That grating, creaking feeling you feel inside is irresistible."

"It doesn't look like it's giving you that much trouble, though."

"I've gotten to the point where my body doesn't make any sounds at all. It's actually quite boring."

So it's boring, huh...

Well, stretching is something that gives you better results the more you do it, after all.

Perhaps this was the fruit -- or rather, the vestiges of her training from when she was on the track team.

"Will you run with me, Hanekawa-san?"

"No, thank you, but I'll make breakfast while you're out running. Let's eat together when you come back."

"Do you dislike running?"

"Not exactly."

As a matter of fact, I liked exercise.

A morning jog was something I did do habitually, though not daily.

It was simply that, were we to run together, then when we return, it would likely end up with Senjougahara-san and me showering together again, and it didn't seem necessary to insert these service scenes all over the place.

It would be dirty in more ways than one.

"Actually, Senjougahara-san, why don't you skip it for today? You look pretty tired."

"I want to run *because* I'm tired."

"You really are an athlete, aren't you?"

As a former member of the track team, she had even had the proper mental training.

It didn't seem as though I needed to be unreasonable and force her to stay, so after assisting her with her stretches (although in the end, I couldn't help in any way that would justify the use of the term) I saw her off, and stood in the kitchen.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 021

"Mm, hmn."

Senjougahara-san put the cucumber from the salad into her mouth, and her face took on an indescribable expression.

I thought I shouldn't make too much of a mess in someone else's kitchen, so the breakfast I had prepared was ever so simple.

The baguette left over from yesterday, and hot milk. Some other dishes like fresh raw vegetables for a salad, and fried eggs over bacon, sunny-side-up, that when I lined them up on the table had made Senjougahara-san comment that they "look delicious" as well.

It had still been fine when she gulped down her milk in a single breath, but her hue changed when she had a mouthful of salad.

It was a complete one-eighty.

"Hanekawa-san, do you mind?"

"...What is it?"

"Oh, no, just hold on. For now, I'd just like to confirm this unbelievable situation."

Having said this, Senjougahara-san once more stuffed salad into her mouth and munched on it. Continuing on, she silently ate the eggs and baguette.

As she did so, her difficult expression did not change.

I wasn't exactly slow, so I could tell more-or-less what Senjougahara-san was thinking by watching her reaction, but... huh?

Did I do something wrong?

Thinking this, I nervously tasted the food I prepared for myself -- but did not find anything wrong in particular.

At the very least, I did not burn the egg or mix detergent into the ingredients or anything like that.

In which case, what was Senjougahara-san displeased by?

If anything, it was me who looked in puzzlement at her, and Senjougahara-san

"Hmmm,"

said this meaningfully.

"Um, Senjougahara-san -- "

"Do you know what 'dressing' is, Hanekawa-san?"

"Huh?"

I was suddenly struck by a question.

"Well, yes, of course. That's the stuff you put on salads *once in a while*, right?"

"I see, I see."

As though grasping the issue, Senjougahara-san nodded deeply.

"What's your opinion on the three-way struggle between those putting Worcester sauce, soy sauce, or pepper on their eggs?"

"Oh, I've heard about people like that. They put things on their eggs."

"Oh, yes, yes."

Senjougahara-san nodded more and more.

As though a favorable result was coming from her experiment.

"Did you notice the butter and jam in the refrigerator?"

"I did... you brought it out yesterday, after all. Oh, sorry, do you usually have some?"

"Hmm,"

However, Senjougahara-san did not leave her seat to get the butter, but tore the baguette apart and quietly chewed on the pieces.

Silently.

"I have some more questions for you."

"Please, go ahead."

"About your eating habits, Hanekawa-san."

"My eating habits? It's all really normal, though."

"How about sushi in soy sauce?"

"I don't dip them."

"How about sauce on your tempura?"

"I don't dip them."

"How about granules in your yoghurt?"

"I don't put them in."

"Do you write on your hamburger or omelette with ketchup?"

"I don't write anything."

"What sauce do you put on your pancake?"

"I don't put anything on."

"How about salt in your rice balls?"

"I don't mix them in."

"What kind of syrup do you like with your snow cone?"

"I like it plain."

"How much sugar in your coffee?"

"I'll have it black, thank you."

I see, and Senjougahara-san ended her questions.

It felt as though I had received some sort of psychological test, but having reached this point, I understood what she was dissatisfied with.

"Oh, I see now. I'm sorry, you're the kind of person who wants dressing on your salad, right, Senjougahara-san? That's why you looked so strange."

"No, I didn't even realize until now that there's a kind of people who *didn't* want salad dressing."

Said Senjougahara-san.

"It's the first time I've seen plain fried eggs as well, and the first time I've seen bread being brought out as just plain bread... um, Hanekawa-san? Do you feel some sort of rejection against adding flavor in your cooking? Satisfied with the natural, unseasoned taste, perhaps?"

"Uh?"

It took some time for me to understand what she was saying, and after troubling over it for a while, I answered, "Oh, no."

"That's not it. I just think that it tastes good and *just the same* with dressing, and it doesn't matter if it's Worcester sauce, soy sauce, or pepper, I can eat eggs *just the same*, and I love both *Kinoko no Yama* and *Takenoko no Sato*."[1]

"I wasn't talking about your taste in chocolates."

Senjougahara-san snapped at me.

Oh, wonderful.

So *that* was worth snapping at.

"But, doesn't cooking taste just as good even without taste?"

"A clincher appears."

"Huh? But I'm just saying that it's all the same whether there's taste or not, you know?"

"This is what people mean when they say, 'letting the cat out of the bag yourself'."[2]

Though I suppose the cat was already long gone before you even realized it, said Senjougahara-san as she put down her chopsticks.[3]

It was very much like her to steadily finish it all anyway without stopping.

"I'm done eating."

Having said that to begin with,

"What I said about having similar tastes with you is now null and void."

she continued with this.

I was voided.

"You're like the opposite of a picky eater, Hanekawa-san. But this is also different from not having likes and dislikes."

"I'm sorry, Senjougahara-san, I still don't really know what you're trying to say."

"Is it the taste of family, perhaps?"

Ignoring my question, Senjougahara-san said this, lost in her own reverie.

"Or no, perhaps you can simply accept any taste... eating anything is fine as you as you gain nutrients from it, maybe, to put it extremely. No, even nutrients are unneeded as long as you can fill your stomach, no...?"

"Please don't talk about me like that, like I'm some sort of warrior."

"So the more tastes there are, the more of a bother it is. If you are not simply enjoying the natural taste -- then in the end, I guess you are simply a permissive person. Perhaps it is a luxury to be fussing over seasoning."

Well, my own common sense just folded quite easily, said Senjougahara-san, and she looked hard at me, when I still had not finished my meal yet.

"But you know... I wonder about that way of living, Hanekawa-san. This isn't just about your eating habits, you are just -- "

Senjougahara-san appeared to be choosing her words.

How rare that was.

" -- accepting everything and anything, aren't you?"

In the end, Senjougahara-san chose the words that she had used before.

"Is having something you dislike not just as important as having something you like? -- And yet, are you not just accepting everything and anything? Is it perhaps the same for me, and for Araragi-kun, as well?"

"Hm?"

Did the conversation just change?

Did the topic just switch?

Did the scale of the talk just expand?

No -- that was not it.

The conversation did not change, and the topic did not switch.

The scale was just the same as before.

This was about my living habits.

The lifestyle of Hanekawa Tsubasa.

"Our tastes aren't similar so much as that my tastes are simply included as a part of your tastes as well -- no, we can't call them 'tastes' on your part, I think. It may be better not to call them as such. After all, liking everything and anything means finding everything and anything to be the same."

"....."

"Hey, Hanekawa-san,"

Continuing to stare right at me, Senjougahara-san said this.

It was, just a bit.

Just a bit -- like the flat tone she had once used in the past.

"Do you actually like Araragi-kun?"

And then, she asked once again.

"Can you tell me that you like Araragi-kun, one more time?"

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑

   Two kinds of chocolate snacks, both produced by Meiji.

2. Jump up ↑ The original: 問うに落ちず語るに落ちる *Tou ni ochizu, kataru ni ochiru* ("not falling for the question, but falling as you talk") is a proverb which describes the care we take when we answer someone else's question, but our indiscretion when we ourselves begin the conversation.
3. Jump up ↑ Following the above: 問うにもとうに落ちてる *Tou ni mo tou ni ochiteru* means "already fallen before even being asked".

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 022

Of course, both Senjougahara-san and I had planned on attending our lessons today, but just before we left, Senjougahara-san realized that, thanks to her superfluous lie the day before, or in other words, her claim that she had influenza, she could not go to school for a week.

"So this is what 'by schemes are schemers drowned' means."

So she said, but I wondered, because from my perspective, it seemed something more comical along the lines of drowning while trying to practice your strokes on dry land.[1]

"Now I've got to stay quiet at home for a week... Why did it come to this? It feels like being put under house arrest even when you've done nothing wrong."

A comical development it might be to me, but to the victim herself this appeared to be a serious situation and Senjougahara-san looked very stressed, though seeing as lying was in and of itself a bad thing, this was probably within the scope of 'reaping what you sow'.

Similar to 'hoisted by your own petard' as well.

"Father will be so angry with me..."

"....."

She, a third-year in senior high, was afraid of her father being angry with her.

Oh, that's adorable.

"But Araragi-kun isn't coming to school for a while, either, so this is just about right, isn't it?"

When I tried saying this, not so much as a source of comfort but out of in fact sarcasm,

"Also true."

she quickly stopped clutching her head.

Idiot couples truly were horrifying.

Thus, I went to school by myself -- as I had expected, when I got there, a storm of questions was waiting for me.

Some degree of curiosity or spectator spirit could not be helped amongst the class, so I was just happy that everyone would worry for me like this.

Lessons began today.

Flipping through the textbooks that I had borrowed from Senjougahara-san "because I won't need them for a week anyway", I ruminated on what Senjougahara-san had said this morning.

"I had thought that a clever person like you, Hanekawa-san, would find the world very bland, you know -- you *already know* so much, so I thought, maybe you wouldn't ever feel excitement or anticipation, but perhaps I was only half-correct, and half-mistaken. There was no guarantee that we had the same interpretation of the term 'bland'. Yes, my assumption had been incorrect in the first place."

I never imagined that someone like that could exist, said Senjougahara-san -- someone who felt no aversion towards the tedious or even the outright impermissible.

Of course, I objected in a hurry.

"Oh, no, I've never thought the world was bland before. I don't like tedious things, and if something is impermissible, I think it's wrong."

"I wonder. It feels to me as though you're saying that just for the sake of saying it -- just for the sake of thinking it."

However, Senjougahara-san did not accept my explanation.

"I have thought about this before, you know. The difference between you and Araragi-kun -- both of you are so eager to sacrifice yourself for the sake of someone else, but from where I stand, it would seem that the two of you are completely different -- to the point that you are not alike at all. To put it simply, Araragi-kun appears to be an imposter, while you are the real original. The things

that you do are the same, so I wondered why this was -- but, after tasting this cooking, I think I understand now."

"Understand...?"

"It does seem like a certain cooking manga, though, to know someone's nature by tasting their cooking."

Said Senjougahara-san.

"Like *Oishinbo*."

"Why did you name it right after avoiding it?"

"You and Araragi-kun, your perceptions of danger are different. For example, if by the road there was the body of a cat ran over by a car -- certainly, the act of burying it would be correct. I believe that that is what you would do, and perhaps Araragi-kun would do so as well, grumbling about something or other as he did."

"....."

"I'm sure, however, that the difference is that he *would* 'grumble' -- if you were to ask why so many people had ignored the dead cat, passing by as though they saw nothing, then why, because burying it would be 'dangerous', of course. It poses a great risk, being known to be a 'good person' by other members of human society -- the likelihood of being taken advantage of is extremely high."

Although children would purposely act worse than they truly were, feeling that 'doing good things is embarrassing', the reason is not 'embarrassment', but because goodness can only be a weak point, a weakness against the ubiquitous 'malice' in the world -- said Senjougahara-san in a halting way.

She laid out her own unique pet theory.

"Araragi-kun probably understands that acting badly is the safe thing to do -- he understands how much he risks by being a 'good person'. He has repeated his acts as an ally of justice so very many times, understanding the likelihood of death, or at best, the likelihood of losing out. That's how he was in middle school, and that's how he has been in high school. That was the cause of him failing at school, but he must have understood the risk of getting this result

beforehand. He acted in such a way, all the while understanding all of this... well, I doubt his grasp of the situation allowed him to predict his own death and rebirth during spring break, of course."

"Spring break..."

At that time -- he felt regret.

It was no mistake that Araragi-kun had felt regret for the actions he had taken -- however,

it was no mistake that he faced that regret.

That was, unmistakably, just as what Senjougahara-san said.

Compared to him, I

"Compared to him, you don't understand it at all -- well, perhaps that's wrong. Even you must understand that risks exist. And yet you *think nothing of them* -- that is, most likely, the gist of the matter. You regret nothing. You act in defiance of all things malicious and impermissible. Or rather, you have accepted it all. I imagine all of that could perhaps be heard as some expression on how incredible you appear to be, but this is utterly different. I have always had the utmost respect for you, Hanekawa-san -- but now, that feeling has disappeared in an instant."

In truth, as Senjougahara-san talked -- nothing she said felt like praise to me.

I did not feel, even in the slightest of ways, that those were words of utmost praise.

In fact, Senjougahara-san was --

angry.

As she had been when she found me sleeping in those ruins this morning -- or perhaps even more so.

"It shocks me how you can even tell me that my cooking's delicious, with senses like those. That was more horrible than Araragi-kun, and he doesn't even bother pretending to be happy."

"Senjougahara-san..."

"For example, Hanekawa-san. What do you think of my livelihood?"

She said.

Senjougahara-san spread her arms, drawing attention to Room 201 of Warren Villa.

"What do you think of my lifestyle? Of our unstable family of father and child living in a dingy one-room flat, my only salvation being not the bathtub but a shower that sometimes has no hot water, our kitchen actually being very meager with only a single stove, and the breaker going off if I so much as use a dryer while the washing machine is running?"

"What do I think...?"

"*You think nothing of it*, yes? You don't feel pity or disgust, yes? Yes, I'm sure that's very splendid. Provided that we are in some sort of novel or comic book -- if this were perhaps the story of some great historical figure, then it would be absolutely wonderful. I might even feel inspired. But you are a real human being, Hanekawa-san. Did you know that?"

Said Senjougahara-san.

Although she continued in her flat tone of voice -- it felt as though she was holding herself back with great effort, and if she were not careful, her wording would become harsher.

"After all, as the person concerned, I consider this lifestyle to be the absolute worst. One might feel that this is infinitely closer to living as a true human being compared to my life in the manor before my parents divorced -- but I've never once had any such flashes of enlightenment. Do you know, I've never once thought that living in poverty would make me closer to becoming a human being? In fact, I think that poverty dulls the wit. And Father, he is working his hardest in order to settle our debts and break us out from our life here. He works with such abandon that it would be no surprise if he broke down eventually -- all of this is because of the sense of danger that he feels, that this cannot be allowed to continue."

But you have no such sense of danger, said Senjougahara-san.

"You recognize that it is currently present, but you have no sense of the

danger, not in the slightest. That was why you could spend an entire night in those ruins."

"If you put it that way..."

That was weak.

I could not object, even had I wanted to.

"Perhaps you are simply too pure -- as white as innocence itself. You do not understand your own heartlessness in condoning foolishness before a fool, nor your cruelty in condoning inadequacy before a failure -- much less realize that it is nothing but spite to refer to defects as virtues. You do not understand at all that affirming the negative is something that cannot be undone. You cannot simply accept everything. If you do so, no one would bother exerting themselves. The desire to improve and advance would be lost -- and yet, you have no wariness for foolish or impermissible things at all. Without thinking, you run along performing your good deeds, even though you know that you will be taken advantage of, and you treat it as logical when you become the maverick amongst the group. Can anything be so terrifying? Living on the cliff's edge like that, it's a wonder you managed to survive so far with all your limbs attached, and for that alone I will admire you. In summary, you are not a good person, nor are you a saint or some Holy Mother -- you are simply dim to the darkness. In that case... you are a failure as a living creature."

Failure.

As it was the first time I had ever been called that, I felt slightly depressed as well.

In the end, as it was time for school, our talk came to a close at around that point, but as I walked, and even now during my lessons, Senjougahara-san's words endlessly reverberated within my mind.

You are not a good person, but simply dim to the darkness.

Dim to the darkness.

Failure, failure, failure -- in other words,

white.

Pure white.

White as innocence itself.

Bright white -- and brazen lies.

"....."

...It was just that, as I sat in the lessons, it was undeniable that all her words had become an exercise in futility, as my attention was instead drawn to the sketches Senjougahara-san had done in the blank spaces in her textbooks.

Every page had an illustration of *Hagaren* on it.

They were ridiculously good, too.

And she's a high-schooler about to go into university?

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ The original: 畳水練 *tatami suiren* translates into 'practise swimming on the floor' and refers to one doing something that's actually pointless or extraneous.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 023

Senjougahara-san was most likely feeling frustrated.

In the end, I hadn't understood even half of what Senjougahara-san had said, of what she had been trying to say, but even so, I got a feeling. That was what it felt like to me.

And it really was just a feeling.

Nothing more than just a feeling.

It was lunchtime, and I left the classroom, heading to the cafeteria to have lunch -- normally I would prepare a lunch box, but of course, I could only do so much in someone else's kitchen.

No, after all the things Senjougahara-san had said to me, I probably wouldn't be able to make lunch even in the kitchen of my own home.

My own home.

If *that* truly existed, then perhaps, like a normal person, my cooking would have this thing called 'taste' -- I thought of such things.

And then.

"...Oh,"

After walking down the hallway for a while, a figure I recognize appeared directly before me -- it was Kanbaru Suruga.

Kanbaru-san was coming from the other side, heading in the opposite direction as me (but even though she was just walking along, she seemed somehow happy. At this distance, I could tell that she was humming a tune) so she noticed me at the same time.

"Ooh!"

Said she, in a voice that was unthinkably loud for the hallway, and she ran up to me, at a speed that was unthinkably fast for the hallway.

An Instant Transmission-like speed.[1]

The two tails of her hair arrived after a short delay.

"Well, well, Hanekawa-senpai! It's been a long time, glad to see you're still well!"

"...Yeah."

She's very energetic, isn't she?

It wasn't just cheeriness.

Not knowing how to respond, I simply nodded.

Judging from her reception, it did not yet reach her that there had been a fire at the Hanekawa house. Well, considering Kanbaru-san's personality, it didn't seem impossible for her to be this energetic even if she knew.

She was courteous, but she had zero consideration for others.

That was the personality of Kanbaru-san.

"I'm heading to see Senjougahara-senpai right now, actually."

Said the courteous yet inconsiderate Kanbaru-san.

"Is she in the classroom?"

"Oh, um,"

This felt rather expected.

She did not even need to say it.

It never crossed my mind that Kanbaru-san would race over in such a manner due to a pressing matter concerning me -- Kanbaru-san was essentially uninterested in anyone except Senjougahara-san.

To the point where she had applied for this school, Naoetsu High, simply to follow her.

Although Araragi-kun had apparently managed to widen that horribly narrow field of view of hers --

Well.

I did feel quite envious of her forwardness.

Or perhaps it should be called her single-mindedness.

At the very least, Senjougahara-san would not feel frustrated with her.

She was, strong.

She was heartening -- would that not be how Senjougahara-san thought of her?

Kanbaru Suruga-san -- Naoetsu High School, second-year.

The underclassman of Senjougahara-san since middle school (in other words, a schoolmate of mine from the same middle school, but I had not been acquainted with her then. I had simply heard about her on my end) and together, they were known as the Valhalla Combo.

They were the Valhalla Combo, due to the words 'god' in 'Kanbaru' and 'battlefield' in 'Senjougahara', and the 'field' in both their names. I subsequently learned that Kanbaru-san came up with it herself.[2] I had thought that it was quite a neat name, but after hearing that she named them herself, there was also the faint scent of disappointment.

She was one of the celebrities here, by the way. At this Naoetsu High, a private school aimed at future university attendants where sports and club activities were pushed to the side, she was an astounding star who guided the girl's basketball team all the way to the nationals (though, to speak the bare truth, the teachers had seemed quite bothered by this. As though they wanted to say, couldn't you see which way the wind was blowing?) But, of course -- as you could tell from the bandages wrapped around her left arm, she had already retired.

Because of the Monkey.

For Kanbaru-san, it was -- a monkey, wasn't it?

Even so, I thought.

When she had been active, Kanbaru-san had a short haircut as befitting an athlete, but the Kanbaru-san before me now had hair as long as I once had, though not yet long enough to be braided.

Putting aside the monstrous speed at which her hair grew -- Kanbaru-san had become more,

girlish.

Or rather, she became more charming. So I thought.

The reason she became this way -- was the same as the reason Senjougahara-san became that way.

It was likely because of Araragi-kun.

Widening her field of view -- was it?

"Senjougahara-san is taking a break today... she has influenza."

...Now I had become an accomplice.

It was unavoidable, though.

If you traced it back to the source, it had been a lie that Senjougahara-san told for my sake -- the only choice I had was to tell the same story.

Perhaps it would have been all right to tell Kanbaru-san the truth, but honestly, she seemed like the talkative type.

She felt like the kind of girl who was too candid and would let slip things that were best left unsaid. Worse, she would not show any remorse.

She would not even bother to argue the point, but simply leave the door open behind her as she left.

"Oh, influenza?"

Said Kanbaru-san, slightly shocked.

"So this is what people mean by the Devil getting sunstroke, huh."

"....."

That was a horrible way to talk about a respected upperclassman.

Courteous yet inconsiderate -- or rather, as Araragi-kun would put it, Kanbaru-san was 'courteous yet impolite', and this just now was an easy-to-understand example.

Well, it's likely that she was just simply using it as an expression (I doubt she

understood the phrase's true meaning).[3]

This would be the moment when Araragi-kun unreservedly made a cutting remark and corrected her mistake, but as I wasn't quite so intimate with Kanbaru-san, I simply returned a silent and vague smile.

Smile!

"...Oh, that's not right."

She understood.

It was a simple joy I felt.

But, hmm, it was difficult to gauge the distance with the friend of a friend (both on the Senjougahara-san Route and the Araragi-kun Route).

Although perhaps in this case, that friend being Kanbaru-san made it all the more problematic.

"Hmn, I see. So Senjougahara-senpai isn't here, huh. Well, what should I do now?"

I had thought for sure that she would turn on her heels and return to her classroom once she found out Senjougahara-san wasn't here, but Kanbaru-san instead folded her arms, appearing very troubled.

If I didn't hurry to the cafeteria, the place would become crowded with the regular cafeteria students, but I couldn't just leave Kanbaru-san here like this.

"Do you need something from Senjougahara-san? If you don't mind, I can hear you out too."

"Mmn -- "

Kanbaru-san thought about this for a moment,

"Well, I guess you'll do, Hanekawa-senpai."

and said this.

...That was just plain rude.

She wasn't even courteous.

I felt I really should call her attention to this, "I got a message from Araragi-

senpai just now, actually."

but Kanbaru-san's forcefulness silenced me as she immediately showed me what her cellphone displayed.

Using cellphones in school, not turning it off while at school, or receiving a message 'just now', which would mean receiving it during lessons -- all these things I had wanted to bring up were suppressed.

By the contents of the message I saw.

'Come alone to the classroom second floor at 9 tonight I need to ask something'

"...What do you think this means?"

"What do you mean, what does it mean...?"

There was no room for interpretation in such a short message -- it was unthinkable for there to possibly be any sort of code.

The tone of the message was rough (it should be 'second floor classroom') but that simply meant he was in a hurry --

"Doesn't it just mean that he has some questions for you, so he wants you to come by yourself to the second-floor classroom at nine o'clock tonight?"

"So that *is* what this is."

Hmm, muttered Kanbaru-san.

Her expression was serious.

"So I guess -- Araragi-senpai is going to be absent today, too, huh?"

"Yeah -- "

I nodded.

She was sharp in certain strange ways -- or rather, she was mysteriously pinpoint at grasping the key matter of a conversation.

It's really not something to be made light of.

" -- Although in his case, it's probably not influenza... he's been on break ever since the second term started."

Just to be sure, I asked our teacher about this, and apparently he wasn't at school yesterday either. With Senjougahara-san, Araragi-kun and I absent at the same time, there had been a flurry of wild speculations among the class.

Wild speculations... I really wish they wouldn't.

Please don't flurry things.

Hmm, muttered Kanbaru-san once again.

"But this thing with Araragi-senpai is going to be a problem, too. Meeting 'in a second floor classroom' is way too vague. Does he know how many buildings we have here in Naoetsu?"

"No, not the school. He probably means that tutorial school."

"Oh, I see."

Said Kanbaru-san, as though she realized this just now.

She was dull in certain strange ways.

"But then, he could have just called me. I've been trying non-stop to call him for a while now, actually, but it wouldn't get through."

"....."

I stayed silent, of course, because I found fault with Kanbaru-san making callings inside school -- not. It was because, due to this new information, I now had absolutely no idea what situation Araragi-kun was in.

I had thought that it was something related to Mayoi-chan, but... why would he call for Kanbaru-san?

It wasn't just not like him...

It just didn't make any sense.

"So basically... he's asking me out on a date! He's not picking up, so he must be preparing some sort of surprise!"

"Judging from the contents, don't you think this is something a bit more serious?"

A 'surprise'? Really? Her thoughts were so blithe.

It was all the more surprising that she was being serious.

How tiring it was just conversing with her!

"Ah, I see, I see. In that case, I understand. There was a book I wanted to read tonight, but if Araragi-senpai wants me, then there can be no other choice. I shall have to overcome all obstacles and answer his call!"

"Overcome all difficulties...?"

She just said herself that she just had a book she wanted to read...

Her manner of speech was so exaggerated, not to mention so theatrical, that from a negative point of view, the more serious she became, the more she appeared conversely to be mocking the speaker. Her personality was disadvantageous in that way.

It wasn't frustrating.

But this sort of single-mindedness was worrying.

"Um, Kanbaru-san..."

"Hm? What is it?"

I had thought of saying something, but in the end, I couldn't put the words together, and

"Be careful."

and

"Please take care of Araragi-kun."

were the only things I managed.

"All right. Now then. Thanks for teaching me so much, Hanekawa-senpai!"

"Oh, no... you're welcome."

"I heard about the fire at your place, so I thought you'd be feeling down, but it doesn't look like that's true, so that's good! Just what I'd expect from you, Hanekawa-senpai!"

"Huh?"

So she really did know.

Amazing, the reception she gave me even while knowing this.

Or, no.

What did you mean, I didn't look like I was down...?

"Well, stay safe!"

Kanbaru-san raised one hand, and returned in the direction she had first come from.

Not running, but walking.

I had thought of warning her about running in the hallway again, but apparently, she did not always run.

She possessed a troubling randomness.

"....."

Seeing as Kanbaru-san was now gone, I should be hurrying to the cafeteria -- as under normal circumstances, I would also need to regain lost time -- but I did not take a single step from where I stood.

What reverberated inside me -- was not the final words of Kanbaru-san.

What entangled my mind was the situation Araragi-kun was in right now.

It was no mistake that Araragi-kun was in some sort of dilemma -- that was already a definite fact. And yet, to call for Kanbaru-san in would mean that the 'thing' he wanted to ask Kanbaru-san was something necessary to escape from said dilemma.

He was not simply requesting help.

There was something much, much more serious.

"....."

That was why I felt it to be so absurd.

It must had been a necessity for Araragi-kun to send a message to Kanbaru-san, so to think that he would seek help, not from me, but from Kanbaru-san -- that was absurd.

But I wonder.

The 'frustration' that Senjoughara-san felt was something that I understood very well and was about to consent to -- but it was really completely unexpected for her to call me 'white' because of it.

Seeing as I felt envious of Kanbaru-san, who got a message from Araragi-kun.

And I certainly was angry.

I was angry -- that Araragi-kun did not send a message to me.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ A reference to *Dragonball Z*.
2. Jump up ↑ As explained in *Bakemonogatari*, 神原 *Kanbaru* is literally written as 'God's field' and 戦場 *senjou* in *Senjougahara* means 'battlefield'.
3. Jump up ↑ The proverb 鬼の霍乱 *oni no kakuran* literally means 'an ogre's sunstroke' but refers to when s strong or healthy person suddenly come down with an illness. Kanbaru probably knows the latter, but does not actually know what *kakuran* means.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 024

Intense feelings of self-hatred assaulted me as I made my way back.

I had thought of asking Kanbaru-san to let me go along with her, but seeing as the message had asked her to 'come alone' that was something I should refrain from -- I knew that much, at least.

Thus came my indecision as to whether I should tell Senjougahara-san about this. As Araragi-kun was her boyfriend, telling her would be the proper line of thought, but it would definitely make her worry -- and she was, in her own way, a girl likely to single-mindedly become angry at him.

I arrived at Warren Villa, still unable to come to a conclusion --

"Oh, welcome back, Hanekawa-san. You're quite late."

"Yeah, I went to the supermarket and bought some things to replace what I used this morning... oh,"

and,

when I opened the door, I noticed one more individual in the room with Senjougahara-san.

It was a man with silver-gray hair, knotted in the back.

With his elegant suit, he truly looked to be a serious person -- to use an expression from another era, he felt like a corporate soldier.

Alternatively, his image suggested an attorney, or a bureaucrat, or something to that effect -- but I knew differently.

I had heard from Senjougahara-san.

That *her father* was working as a consultant at some foreign-owned enterprise --

"Pleased to make your acquaintance."

and,

he greeted me first.

He had been sitting at the table, but purposely stood up and bowed.

"I am Hitagi's father."

"Oh... um,"

I was perplexed.

In fact, Senjougahara-san had told me that her father would be coming back today, but I did not think that he would be back so early.

As you would expect from someone working at such a company, he was not tied down by time, and I felt an absurd sort of amazement.

"Hanekawa Tsubasa. Excuse me, I took the liberty of staying at your home last night."

"I see."

Senjougahara-san's father nodded.

And then he became quiet -- he felt to me like a taciturn sort of person.

He appeared to be an extremely, heavily silent man, though when I continued standing at the door without taking off my shoes, he gave me a glance, and

"Let's make some tea."

headed to the kitchen.

Then, he put a kettle on the stove.

With his words, and his actions, all tensions eased, and I managed to take off my shoes.

Caught my breath.

Without taking my eyes off her father, I sat down beside Senjougahara-san.

"I'm sorry, Hanekawa-san. Father finished up at work quicker than expected, so he came back earlier than I thought he would."

Said Senjougahara-san in a whisper.

"No, it's all right."

I was the one who intruded in the first place, I whispered back.

"But if that's the case, you could have just messaged or called me."

"Oh, well, I wanted to give you a surprise."

"....."

Consider me surprised.

To think that Araragi-kun had surprises like this sprung on him day by day, his life must have been, despite appearances, quite challenging as well.

"Your father's very stylish."

I said.

Not as simple flattery.

I saw now, regardless of how serious she might have been, that Senjougahara-san's self-proclaimed love for her father made sense -- if you were to live together with such a father, all the males of your own age would probably appear as nothing but children.

That Araragi-kun had managed to succeed against eyes of such sharp taste, well, it was a complicated feeling, but he really was amazing.

It was common folklore that women fall in love with those who resemble their fathers, but in that sense, Senjougahara-san's father, who was preparing tea leaves right now, and Araragi-kun were completely unlike one another.

They weren't simply different types of people. You could even consider them of completely different dispositions.

Although Araragi-kun liked to maintain an air of coolness, and was even called a 'motionless mute', he actually quite liked talking -- next to Senjougahara-san's father, who was truly taciturn, they were two utter extremes.

Furthermore -- tautological though this might be, Senjougahara-san's father, while stylish, was stylish in that 'dad'-like way, the kind of 'father' you could find anywhere, but not really as a 'man', so to speak.

As for what that indicated --

...No, no, I shouldn't.

What could come of analyzing a friend's father like this?

I thought I had already given up on doing these things.

Right.

It would seem the abrupt appearance of the 'father' had flustered me somewhat. I should have known better.

Not, that I was so amazing a person that I could tell myself 'I should have known better.'

A normal girl -- I was not, but regardless.

To begin with, of course I was flustered -- after all, I did not even possess this image of 'father', of a 'dad'.

There was one whom I ought to call my father.

But one whom I should call 'Father' -- I knew of no such person.

I knew nothing.

"Did anything out of place happen at school?"

As though declaring that the fact of her father being here was now closed for discussion, Senjougahara-san changed the topic of conversation.

That sort of pushiness she had really was an example I ought to follow.

"Out of place?"

"Did Araragi-kun come?"

That was what she had wanted to ask, apparently.

I was slightly lost, but feeling that it would be strange to hide anything, I told her of what happened at school.

"A message to Kanbaru?"

"Yep. Looks like the issue he's dealing with right now needs Kanbaru-san's help... at any rate, the message was too short, so I don't know why he needs to call Kanbaru-san out..."

"How unpleasant."

Senjougahara-san was surprisingly frank, saying this together with an expression of displeasure.

This wasn't just single-minded anger. This was rage.

Moreover, she was enraged not by Araragi-kun, but by Kanbaru-san.

The tip of the blade was aimed not at her boyfriend, but at her underclassman.

I immediately regretted what I had said.

What would I do if this caused a rift between the Valhalla Combo?

"Leaving me behind to get asked for help by Araragi-kun, whatever shall I do with that woman? First, I'll take her insides,"

"Senjougahara-san, your personality's turning back."

"Oh."

Noticing this, Senjougahara-san pulled on her own cheeks and made a smile.

How pitiful it was, to see a smile forced like this...

"There's probably a reason, I think -- for that, I mean. He said there's something he wanted to ask her, and besides, unlike the two of us, isn't there still an abnormality remaining in Kanbaru-san's left arm?"

"Yes -- remain it does."

The monkey's paw.

Said Senjougahara-san.

"In other words, rather than Kanbaru -- perhaps what he needed was Kanbaru's left arm."

"Well, it's just a guess."

I doubted that it was something so simple, but as a general idea, the possibility was quite high.

"If he really did need to lend the combat strength of Kanbaru -- would that mean that things had unfolded into a battle yet again?"

"Well, that's hard to say. But if we're talking about combat strength, then Araragi-kun has Shinobu-chan right now -- it's not set in stone that he needs her help in a fight."

They were all simply guesses.

Without knowing what situation Araragi-kun was currently in, Senjougahara-san and I would never be able to reach a conclusion no matter how much we talked.

"Well? What will you do, Hanekawa-san?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will you go to that waiting spot, or not? Regardless of his situation, if you go there, you'll be able to meet Araragi-kun, no?"

"...I did consider that, but I don't think I will. I get the feeling that I'll get in the way if I do -- "

"I see."

Senjougahara-san nodded to my answer.

"Then I won't go, either."

"Really?"

Having been entirely sure that Senjougahara-san would insist on going herself, I had expected a very vocal argument, so rather than being unexpected, this felt more as though she had dodged my question.

And I was already thinking of ways to stop the resolute, insistent Senjougahara-san from going, too.

"I'll take the lack of news as proof of his well-being -- anyway, unlike the time with Kanbaru's monkey, it doesn't seem as though he is hiding anything. If anything, he is being quite upfront. If he sent a message to Kanbaru, he sent it knowing that she would tell the two of us."

That was true.

However.

"...You're not going?"

"I'm not."

Answered Senjougahara-san, to my pointed question.

"Just like you, Hanekawa-san. I doubt I can accomplish anything but get in the way even if I go -- and I feel that there are other things I can do, as well."

The meaning behind the deep words she added was completely unknown to me -- but for the moment, it seemed that was how it would be.

The lack of news was proof of his well-being.

And a testament to her faith in him.

Let's just leave it at these convenient explanations --

"...Though it would seem that it wasn't only Araragi-kun and Kanbaru with abnormalities remaining inside them."

"Huh? Who else is there?"

I tilted my head at her remark.

"Araragi-kun's demon and Kanbaru-san's monkey are the only abnormalities still around us, aren't they?"

"That's right, nyaa."

For some reason, Senjougahara-san answered with the inflection of a cat.

I felt like pressing the question a bit more, but at that time, Senjougahara-san's father brought us tea for three, so our whispered talk was brought to a close.

Well, even had he taken slightly more time to brew the tea, the talk would likely have ended here regardless.

For it was then that I heard a knocking sound on the door of Warren Villa, Room 201 -- they had no intercom, by the way.

"Ah, it seems they have arrived."

Seeing the way Senjougahara-san stood up, it would seem to be an expected guest.

However, expected though they might have been, I did not know who they

were, and my body stiffened slightly, but after Senjougahara-san opened the door and I saw the girls on the other side, I understood everything.

What the 'scheme' Senjougahara-san had spoken of yesterday was.

It needed no further explanations.

And them no further introductions.

On the other side of the door were Araragi-kun's younger siblings, Araragi Karen and Araragi Tsukihi, the Fire Sisters.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 025

The following conversation apparently occurred at some point.

"My, my, if it isn't Karen-san. What a coincidence it is, meeting you at a place like this."

"And you're Senjougahara-san, right? Yeah, it's a real coincidence, you running into me in front of my own house and all."

"Yes, it's almost as though I looked up the exact route you take to get home with the navigator in my cellphone and waited here to ambush you. Heheh."

"Ahaha, there might really be people stupid enough to misunderstand it like that -- the world's full of idiots, y'know? It's not often you find people as smart as me. I know, it's a shame, really. Oh, but Senjougahara-san, what about school?"

"School? What's that?"

"Oh, well, I guess it's fine if you don't know..."

"Oh, I jest. I do know, of course. Just a Gahara Gag. Due to some unavoidable circumstances I am on break today. Your school is still on half-days, yes, Karen-san?"

"Yeah. But you have really bad timing, Senjougahara-san. You probably wanted to see my brother by accident, but as luck would have it, he's out right now -- he went off somewhere just as the new term started. Well, I've gone soul-searching a second time myself, too. He should be able to fire off a Kamehameha by the time he's back."[1]

"Going on a journey to find yourself doesn't really involve that sort of training... never mind."

"He should be able to fire off an *Evangelion: Ha* by the time he's back."[2]

"I doubt Araragi-kun has that kind of talent... oh, speaking of which, I just suddenly remembered, by which I mean it is quite a surprise to me as well, but

did you know that there was a fire at Hanekawa-san's house?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, what a foolish question that was. Araragi Karen, ally of justice, the fighter of the Fire Sisters by whose sole efforts the peace of this town is kept, not knowing of such an enormous incident? Unthinkable."

"Uh? Oh, um, yeah, right. I knew that. Yeah, that was terrible. I was just thinking of maybe going to visit her and see how she's doing."

"Luckily, it happened while she was at school, so she wasn't hurt. However, since she was burnt out of her house, she doesn't have any place to sleep tonight."

"Huh? Really?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Oh, I know, I know. I was just thinking of bringing that up. Why did you say it first, Senjougahara-san?"

"I'm sorry about that. But how strange it is, really. A good girl like Hanekawa-san, with no bed for her to have a good night's sleep in, in the whole wide world? Nothing could be more outrageous. Really, if justice truly existed in the world, I'd wonder what it was trying to do right now."

"....."

"Well, thanks to this so-called 'justice' being all talk and no action, I actually took a day off from school today to help Hanekawa-san look for a place to sleep. Oh, speaking of which, you went to school just as normal, didn't you, Karen-san? Did you have fun while Hanekawa-san was suffering?"

"....."

"Oh my, I'm sorry. There's no helping the cause even if I talk to you about this. You may be Araragi-kun's sister, but you're just a middle-schooler, after all. It would be expecting too much for me to treat you like Araragi-kun. Onii-chan is Onii-chan, Karen-san is Karen-san."

".....!"

"Yes, I really do have poor timing, don't I? Why, if Araragi-kun were here right now, he would never abandon Hanekawa-san. But, for the, oh, 'Fire Sisters' (hah), well."

"(Hah)?!"

"I'm so very sorry, I know you can't do anything without your beloved brother around, so this sort of talk is just bothering you, isn't it? It wasn't my intent to trouble you, you know, not while you were enjoying life to the fullest, which is the exact opposite of what Hanekawa-san is doing right now. It's perfectly all right for Hanekawa-san to suffer, yes? Well, we've been standing here talking for quite some time, but I should take my leave now. Seeing as I now know that, just like Hanekawa-san's bed, justice no longer exists in this world."

"Hold up!"

"Huh? What is it?"

"Hanekawa-san *does* have a bed... and justice *does* exist!"

.....

Thus, Senjougahara-san dexterously manoeuvred Karen-chan and succeeded in her 'scheme' or what have you -- not that I thought it was exactly 'dexterous'.

Rather, it felt something more along the line of waiting for chance to walk up and hit you over the head.[3]

If anything she did had been scheme-like, it was making the simple Karen-chan, rather than the planner Tsukihi-chan, her target.

As such.

I arrived at the Araragi house.

In the living room of the Araragi house...

"Well then, just treat this like your own place, Tsubasa-san."

"That's right. Just think of this as your own home. Think it all you like, Hanekawa-san."

Said Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan as they got a drink for me.

They managed it deftly without needing any prior arrangements, dividing the

tasks between Karen-chan who took out some chilled barley tea from the refrigerator, and Tsukihi-chan who took glass cups from the cupboard.

The teamwork of the Fire Sisters (hah)... I mean, Fire Sisters was, as could be seen, quite impressive.

They communicated without words.

One's own home -- huh.

This was actually not the first time I had entered the Araragi house -- I had visited many, many times before. I still acted as Araragi-kun's home tutor (though we did not study in the house, but at the library) and in particular, when Karen-chan had collapsed in a high fever, I made myself comfortable and stayed here until late at night.

However, how should I put it, late though it might be, this was the first time I was welcomed here as a 'guest'.

I felt a strange sense of nervousness.

Or rather, I felt a strange sense of discomfort.

"....."

Araragi Karen-chan and Araragi Tsukihi-chan.

Araragi-kun's little sisters.

The more I looked, the more they resembled him.

You could even say they were his spitting image.

Strange simile though it might be, they were like differently-aged triplets.

Of course, their personalities, or rather character traits, were quite different -- Karen-chan was a combat sport enthusiast and boyish, while Tsukihi-chan seemed gentle, but was in fact very firm inside.

...What surprised me was that both their hairstyles had changed since I last met them.

Karen-chan's characteristic ponytail had been cut off and now she wore a bob cut (she had straight bangs, like Senjougahara-san and I had had before) while Tsukihi-chan had her hair in a thick braid wrapped around her neck like a muffler

(wasn't that hot, during the summer?)

"Anyway, you're just so icy, Tsubasa-san."

Bringing only her own cup of barley tea, Karen-chan sat down on the sofa.

By 'icy', she likely meant I was being reserved.

"If you didn't have a place to sleep, the very first thing you should've done was come ask me for help. I mean, really, I was just waiting for you to ask, Hanekawa-san. Well, I thought maybe it'd be hard for you to say it yourself, so I brought it up myself."

She still did not realize that she had been manipulated by Senjougahara-san.

The lie, that she had known about the calamity at the Hanekawa house all along, was now more deeply believed by none other than Karen-chan herself. I wasn't worried about her future, but only because she was plenty dangerous now as a middle-schooler.

"That's right. Karen-chan brought it up herself!"

Saying this, Tsukihi-chan came soon after bringing cups for both herself and me. It would seem that she, smiling as she sat next to Karen-chan, had accepted Senjougahara-san's proposal knowingly.

Yes.

She was quite devious, this one.

Karen-chan was in her third year of middle school and Tsukihi-chan her second year, by the way.

Sitting together like this and wearing the same clothes (the Tsuganoki No. 2 Middle School uniform), they really did look like twins (though they had a height difference when they stood, so they would no longer look to be so.)

"By the way, this is called barley tea, right? Does it mean that if it works hard enough, it can become beer?"

Karen-chan suddenly opened up and began small talk.

When it came to dealing with people, she had an incredible lack of reserve.

It wasn't a talk we should be having five minutes after I was welcomed into her

home.

Please let me ease my tension first.

"Tracing it back, the raw material of both was barley, but barley tea is roasted, whereas beer is fermented, so, well."

Putting aside whether 'working hard' was the correct expression, they certainly were relatives in terms of beverages. I had wanted to say that it was completely wrong, but, hmm, Karen-chan's question was unexpectedly to-the-point regarding the essence of the subject.

"Hmmm. So I guess it's no wonder that drinking barley tea gets you in a great mood."

A disappointing conclusion, however.

Karen-chan gulped down the entire cup of tea in one go -- she was quite hearty.

And actually, now that I looked at the cup closely, it was of a very high quality.

Was that Baccarat glassware?

Even if it wasn't, all the same, it was almost disrespectful to call it a 'cup'.

Moreover, judging from the way they were handled, Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan did not know of the value of these cups...

Could it be that the Araragi family was wealthy?

"Well, at any rate,"

Said Tsukihi-chan, casting a sidelong glance at Karen-chan.

She seemed to be used to Karen-chan's riotousness precisely because she was her sister.

"If you don't have a place to stay, you can stay at our home for as long as you like. Conveniently enough, Onii-chan is out right now. You can just use his room."

"Araragi-kun's -- room."

"Yep. It's pointlessly got this pointlessly springy bed."

I -- knew that.

Moreover, this was the 'essence' of the scheme that Senjougahara-san had thought of.

It was difficult for me to express this, but it was impossible not to feel more than just a little guilt about this scheme which took advantage of Karen-chan's and Tsukihi-chan's innocent sincerity, as well as the Fire Sisters' sense of justice -- however, seeing as the way they felt was entirely a result of their own affections, I could not remain so coldly reticent.

Having thoroughly predicted how I would feel about this, Senjougahara-san turned this idea into her 'scheme' without letting me know.

So that, to the end, I would know nothing.

She took it upon herself to bear the role of the villain.

It was too much of a mystery to me, what kind of mental state she must be in having helped arrange for another girl (said girl being me, of all people) to stay at her own boyfriend's home, but on that front, it was perhaps due to the intropunitive tendencies that she had had since long before and retained to this day.

She endured the pain.

That was what she had done for me.

When I thought this, the words of Karen-chan earlier finally pierced my heart.

Icy -- reserved.

The first thing you should've done was come ask me for help.

I -- was waiting to be asked myself.

Just like when Senjougahara-san had me stay at her home, I did not seek help on my own -- surely, I thought, this logic was the complete opposite of what Oshino-san had said about people 'getting saved all by themselves'.

Yes.

I had -- given myself up to despair, probably.

I did not think of getting saved myself.

It also made me remember what Senjougahara-san had said to me this

morning.

I simply accepted the lack of tastes.

I was dim to the darkness.

A failure as a living creature.

"...Tsubasa-san? What's wrong? You're spacing out. You got this really stupid look on your face."

"....."

She really didn't hold back with her words, did she?

A really stupid look? What's that supposed to mean?

"I guess it's really a shock to have a fire at your place, huh? The only time I've ever seen something like that before was Nagasawa-kun from *Chibi Maruko-chan*."

"...Oh, no, I'm fine."

So I said.

I said I was fine -- even though I couldn't possibly be.

"But, all right, I'll take you up on your offer and stay here -- until Araragi-kun comes home, at least."

I didn't know when that would be but, well, it was simply a case of whether the ones whom I should call my father and mother found a place to rent, or that, would happen first.

I had no clue for either of them, so it couldn't be helped no matter how deeply I thought about it.

"Thank you so much for this."

"Same for us!"

"Let's have a good time with this."

Somehow, it happened in the course of shaking hands.

We managed to form some sort of ring.

Were we going to do ballet, or something?

I didn't know how Senjougahara-san had explained the situation with the Hanekawa family (actually, Senjougahara-san herself didn't know about the situation with the Hanekawa family) but I was honestly thankful that the two of them did not ask me about it.

"Let's have a pajama party, Tsubasa-san!"

"I won't be able to take you up on that."

"Then how about play-wrestling, or something!"

"No, thank you."

"Oh, I'm the oldest girl, so I've always wanted a big sister, y'know? Can I call you 'Onee-chan' while you're staying here?"

Karen-chan said something that sounded rather like what Sengoku-chan had done.

Tsukihi-chan watched over Karen-chan with a smile -- who would be able to tell who the older sister here was?

Then, I realized something.

Or rather, it was something which I had thought of from the very beginning.

"Oh, that's right, seeing as I'll be here for quite a while, I really should say hi to your parents."

In all the times I had visited the Araragi house before, it was by the intent of Araragi-kun, or Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan, and I had never met their mother proper -- no matter how much Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan wanted me to stay, if their parents refused, then I would have no choice but to leave.

Hmm, I wondered.

In dealing with a high school girl who slept here and there like some sort of refugee from the local net cafe, would the normal verdict of an adult with good sense not be to lecture her and persuade her to return to *her parents' home*?

"It should be all right, I think."

Said Tsukihi-chan.

"Papa and Mama are *our* parents, and Onii-chan's parents, after all, so their personalities are pretty close to ours."

"Oh... but,"

"They both have a hot-blooded sense of justice, so they definitely won't tell someone in trouble to leave."

Tsukihi-chan seemed very confident, for some reason.

Speaking of which, I had no idea at all what Araragi-kun's parents were like.

Perhaps that was obvious, seeing as we had never met before, but it was telling that Araragi-kun had been reluctant regarding this topic -- it was part of a high school boy's biological nature to keep silent about his parents, so I had never been particularly bothered... and Araragi-kun did not seem to be good at dealing with his parents in the first place.

But a sense of justice?

Not to mention a hot-blooded sense of justice?

How unnatural.

"Hey, Karen-chan, Tsukihi-chan. For future reference, you told me before that your parents work together, right?"

"Yep."

They nodded at the same time.

"They should be back at around six today."

"...And what is it that they do?"

Their voices rang out at the same time.

"They're police!"

.....

So this was why Araragi-kun tried his best to hide it, I thought, and at the same time, I felt that Hell had truly frozen over.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ A reference to the famous attack from *Dragon Ball*.
2. Jump up ↑ The Japanese subtitle for *Evangelion 2:0: You Can (Not) Advance* is 破 *Ha*, 'break'.
3. Jump up ↑ The original reference here is quite complex: it refers to an old Chinese proverb (*Shou Zhu Dai Tu*) describing foolish acts which rely entirely on chance for a desirable outcome. It is derived from an anecdote wherein a farmer witnessed a rabbit accidentally breaking its neck from running into a tree stump, and figuring that, if he watched the tree stump every day, he would not need to work for food any more.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 026

There had been, of course, some dispute.

Although their daughters had described them as possessing a hot-blooded sense of justice, the Araragi couple had good sense as befitting adults (and police officers) and it became a matter of whether it was a good idea.

However, after saying 'it can't be helped if that's the case', they allowed me to stay in the end, more readily than I had expected, though certainly not enthusiastically.

Of course, Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan also gave their best in trying to persuade them -- but in this respect, they certainly did feel like the parents of Araragi-kun.

They both resembled him, after all.

On that note, while the resemblance among 'family' was of course a matter of genetics, apparently, the indirect aspect of having the same living cycle was also quite a factor. Seeing as they live under the same roof, go through life at the same pace and eat from the same menu, their bodies were made from the same materials, so it was easy to understand the logic that the finished products were similar.

In contrast, if the pace and menu were all different among individual members like the Hanekawa house, they would not resemble one another at all.

That would be why it's said that there was a certain sense of identity in a family whose members resembled one another in appearance and personality -- in that way, Araragi-kun's family was a healthy one.

Seeing how they were during dinner, which they allowed me to take part in, made me feel it.

What it was to have a family conversation.

It was a very fresh idea, and I let myself become involved -- although I winced

somewhat at being persistently questioned by Araragi-kun's mother regarding her only son.

After that, it was time for a bath.

Speaking of which, it had been three days since I used a bathtub.

It had apparently become some sort of rule for them lately, but Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan came into the bath together -- it was really too tight!

"You really aren't pretentious at all, are you, Tsubasa-san."

This was the conversation we had in said bathtub.

The three of us were tightly packed, like some sort of experiment in how many people one could fit into a telephone box, so in other words, it was far too cramped for any interpretation of sensuality, and within this space, Karen-chan said.

"I mean, maybe it's just because I'm an idiot, but when I talk with smart people at school, a lot of them make me think, wow, you're really smart. It's like they go out of their way to string together really tough words, and bring up stuff that no one cares about. But you're smart, Tsubasa-san, and you talk to me from the same level. That's just really great."

"That's true."

Tsukihi-chan joined in.

Her hair was quite long once she unravelled it for the bath.

It would seem that the speed at which her hair grew was beyond Kanbaru-san.

Truly monstrous.

"But apparently, that's how it really is, Karen-chan. People who really are smart... actually, 'first-rate' people who are good at stuff, whether it's sports or whatever, sound surprisingly normal when you talk to them, and they totally lose that air they have. But it's probably *because* they're the real thing, so they don't need to put on airs."

"....."

There was some unease as I felt I was being praised, though it was true what

Tsukihi-chan had said about 'first-rate' people having surprising degrees of normality, and she was correct in that regard, but in my case, that was not how it was.

I was not normal.

And -- I was not smart.

I doubt anyone could be more pretentious, more embellished than me -- I realized this during Golden Week, and before the Cultural Festival.

So much so that I wanted to refuse it.

So much so that I felt hatred for it.

"I've always thought about how things would look from a smart person's perspective."

Said Karen-chan.

"Like how, even if you look at the same thing, you could see something different. I mean, to me, pi's just a list, but maybe, to Einstein, it's actually a beautiful sequence."

"Oh, I don't know about that."

I answered vaguely.

The question was, in every way, difficult to respond to.

In fact, the sense needed to realize the worth and meaning behind mathematical beautilities such as pi, or the golden ratio, only existed within a small part of geniuses -- however, I truly did not believe that cleverness was a requirement for it.

Even among clever people, there must be those who see pi as nothing more than a list, I thought, and the opposite must exist as well.

It was simply a matter of individual differences, and not a set condition.

The difference between the perspectives of Karen-chan and Einstein, and the difference between the perspectives of Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan, probably did not have that great a difference in and of themselves.

"For example, say there is a novel narrated in first person. If you tell it from a

different viewpoint, it will become a completely different story, I think. It's the same as how the Casebook as told by Dr Watson would feel quite different when told by Mr Holmes himself."

Speaking of which, in the Casebook of Sherlock Holmes, a short story with an omniscient narrator also existed.

However, as it was from an objective point of view, it was not quite correct to say that it was a world which possessed correctness.

It was not necessarily true that God could not make mistakes.

For example.

He accidentally created humans.

.....Although, now that I had had such intimate contact with the beauty of Karen-chan's body, its muscles tightened by her training, and Tsukihi-chan's lovely and contrastively younger figure, I began to wonder, 'does Araragi-kun always get along with sisters like these?', and could not help but gain something of an understanding into the reason behind his eccentricities.

And so on and so forth.

Then, I got up from the bath.

The underwear bought from the shop had been used up, and I thought I could live with reusing them for one night, but Karen-chan lent me a new pair of shorts.

She lent me a set of pajamas, as well.

It would be odd of me to act reserved now, so I meekly accepted both.

"Huh? But isn't this men's size?"

"Hm? Oh, that. It's Nii-chan's."

Bwah.

I just put on Araragi-kun's pajamas...

I looked at myself in the mirror.

What's with this feeling, like I've done something I shouldn't have?

On the other hand, if I were to take it off now, it would seem like I was strangely conscious of it -- or, no, that was just an excuse.

Now that I had put it on, I felt some resistance towards taking it off again,

"Hmm, I see. The size is just right."

and like so, I said something normal that couldn't be amounted to an attempt to hide my embarrassment, and began brushing my teeth before bed.

Still, I really couldn't tell Senjougahara-san about this, could I...?

After that, with the two leading me on, we headed to Araragi-kun's room.

Now that I actually thought about it (though it was something I already knew without thinking), I had invaded the Araragi house with absolutely no permission from Araragi-kun, borrowing his pajamas and his bed. It would not be an exaggeration to call me some sort of ruffian who just did as she pleased.

Worse, he did not even know that I was here by permission of his family and his girlfriend.

I did think I should at least send him a message, but under the present condition, with me having no idea what situation he was in, I naturally hesitated.

I'm wearing your pajamas right now, Araragi-kun.

If I did send him such a message, assuming he could even receive it, I got the feeling it would have a considerably negative effect on whatever serious situation it was that he had landed himself in.

Besides, looking at the clock (I had noticed it when I was allowed in before, but Araragi-kun's room had four clocks, for some reason. He didn't strike me as that punctual a person...) it was already past nine. When it occurred to me that he was meeting with Kanbaru-san about now, I, oh, hm -- well.

I hesitated.

"Well, good night, Tsubasa-san. You can use anything you want in this room."

"Good night, Hanekawa-san. See you tomorrow."

Said the Araragi sisters, and they went off, leaving me alone in Araragi-kun's room, not knowing what to do.

Not that there was anything I *could* do besides sleep.

Even if I wanted to do my daily studies, I did not even have textbooks -- they were lent to me by Senjougahara-san.

As I thought about perhaps going to the library tomorrow to borrow some books for school, I found myself glancing at Araragi-kun's bookshelf.

Although Karen-chan said that I could 'use anything' in this room, I of course could not do as I pleased in Araragi-kun's room. However, I could be forgiven for looking at the books on his shelf.

His line-up had changed quite a bit since the last time I was here -- he told me that he did not throw away books, so it would seem he was the type to put unread books on the shelf and finished books in the closet.

There were many novels, surprisingly.

From the way he usually talked and conducted himself, you would think he read only comic books.

I took out a foreign novel at random and, afterwards, sat down on the chair facing the desk and read for about one hour. However, the feeling *of Araragi-kun* coming from the desk and chair meant the words did not enter my mind at all.

By the time I turned off the light and laid down on the bed, it was past eleven.

Even so, after realizing that I was currently putting my head on Araragi-kun's pillow and sleeping in his bed while wearing his pajamas, it was impossible for me to sleep, and it was only after the hand had passed the hour mark that I managed to fall asleep.

I should not blame Araragi-kun.

It would be improper of me to think such a thing.

Monogatari Series:Nekomonogatari (White)/Tsubasa Tiger 027

Mistress finyally fell asleep after 12 o'clock, so as usual, it's my turn on the stage nyan.

But, well, to think I'd wake up in that human bastard's room, this reminds me of Golden Week nyan.

A quirk of fate. All the myriad ways we have been brought together nyan.

And it's nyot a good thing for Mistress, either nyaa.

It's nyot that I can't understand the real motive behind Senjougahara Hitagi's mediation, well, nyot that I'm sure I'm right about it, but anyway, on that front, it's just frustrating nyan.

Nyot that I can do anything about this nyaa.

In the end, I'm just Mistress herself.

I can't do anything that Mistress won't nyaa -- it's a sad feeling of powerlessness, nyow that I think about it nyan.

"Nyow then..."

I got up from the bed, got on all fours and stretched my back -- it's what cats do nyan -- and then said this to confirm with myself.

"...But, what's this all about nyaa? Seeing as I'm out like this, it must mean Mistress is feeling some sort of stress again... but I don't knyow exactly what it is nyaa. I thought it must've been because of that fire at the house, but seeing as I'm still coming out even nyow, it looks like it's nyot just about the fire nyaa -- "

Apparently, this is how the me **this time** is going to be like.

During Golden Week, I was pretty much just like Mistress, and before the Cultural Festival, I was so connected to Mistress you could've called me her inner personyality -- but this time, it looks like Black Hanekawa is almost completely cut off from her person nyan.

Have I gained independence as an abnyormality thanks to coming out so many times nyaa? I'm pretty bad in the head, so I don't really knyow, but if that annyoying Aloha were here, he'd probably have a different explanyation.

"But the times when I come out sure are getting convenient nyaa -- it's actually flexible, how I only appear when Mistress is sleeping nyan. The last two times, he had to work pretty hard just to get me back inside. Nyahaha, he even needed help from that bratty little vampire nyaa."

"And of whom do you refer to as 'bratty little vampire'?"

"Nyan?!"

Someone answered my monyologue nyan.

I can see her nyow, but, at some point she was there -- or *is* it 'at some point'? She was sitting in the room, no, on top of the room, on the ceiling, with her arms around her knees, like she had been there since before the universe began.

A little blonde girl.

It was that Oshino Shinobu nyan.

When I saw her before, she had a helmet with goggles on, but it looks like she stopped wearing it nyaa.

And on top of that.

When I saw her before, plus that time during Golden Week, she was expressionless, but nyow -- how should I put it, she's looking down on me with a terrible smile on her face nyaa.

...Even though she's got what passes for a smile nyow, I wonder why she looked cuter when she didn't have an expression at all nyan.

"Hmph,"

The vampire went ahead and said.

She's totally puffed-up nyan.

Actually, I've fought her twice and lost both times, so of course, she really can do as she pleases nyan -- it doesn't matter whether I'm Black Hanekawa or a Hindering Cat, because as an abnyormality, I can't even reach the soles of her

feet.

"Long has it been, cat -- it eludes me why you would skulk in my Lord's chamber, but to seek the reason behind the appearance of an abnormality would be tasteless, I suppose."

I am not like that Aloha brat, said the vampire.

Hmmmn.

I thought about asking her, 'why are you here?' but I guess that goes both ways nyaa.

"Wait. Huh? Weren't you supposed to be locked up in that human bastard's shadow nyaa?"

That's how it was supposed to be nyaa.

If Mistress recalls correctly.

So, seeing as she's here, it's strange for that human bastard to nyot be -- *he* isn't sticking to the ceiling nyaa.

I'm nyot seeing anything scary like that right nyow nyaa.

"Correct -- yet a slight irregularity has ensued."

Said the vampire sitting on the ceiling nyah.

"At this moment, the pairing between myself and my Lord -- in other words, between Oshino Shinobu and Araragi Koyomi has been severed."

"Been -- severed?"

Nyan? I tilted my head.

What's that supposed to mean nyan.

"By which I meant we were returned to our states before the coming of that Aloha brat -- no, matters haven't worsened even further. Alas, I know not where my Lord is, nor of his condition. I am completely in the dark..."

Stopping in mid-sentence, the vampire snyorted and looked at me with scorn nyan.

"Confiding in you makes hardly any difference."

She just went and gave up nyan.

Nyot that it wasn't the right decision.

I don't even understand conversations beyond three lines nyan.

Anyway, it seems that human bastard is really in quite the predicament right nyow -- I mean, really, isn't he in a pretty serious situation if he got cut off from this vampire nyaa?

Like that time with the Monkey.

Just what is going on with him right nyow?

I haven't got any reason to worry about him (actually, I hate the guy nyan) but if Mistress finds out, she'll definitely worry nyaa -- in that way, it's pretty good timing that it's me who's out, as in, while Mistress is sleeping, when this vampire showed up.

"It occurred to me that perhaps my Lord would return home, but it was a faint hope. And now I must suffer your presence as well. Revenge *is* a dish best served cold."

"....."

Even I knyow she's using that proverb wrong nyan.[1]

Though I get what she's trying to say nyaa.

Nyaa, I'm nyot built for this sort of thing, but let's see if I can't help her out.

Nyot with correcting the proverb, but with the human.

"Your Lord or whatever should be at that tutorial school tonight, at around nine o'clock nyaa. A meeting with that monkey girl nyaa."

"A meeting? With the monkey? What purpose could she serve at such a late -- aah, I see. Yes, it is clear to me now that even my Lord possesses some presence of mind in this. Rather than choosing an abnormality, he chose the lass for her heredity."

"Her heredity?"

"Well -- quite the news this is, what you have just told me. It was no fool's errand, after all. You may receive my praise. I fancied sucking your blood to stave

off the boredom, but as a symbol of my gratitude, I shall refrain."

She's got some outrageous thoughts going through her head nyaa.

Close one nyaa, close one.

"Or rather, would it not be well of me to do just that out of gratitude? You are her stress, and if I absorb you, it should provide her some reprieve -- in some measure."

"Ha. I'll have to say nyo to that nyaa."

Nyow that she mentioned it, that's exactly the case, and in fact, it was thanks to her sucking me out that Mistress got 'saved' the last two times -- but things are a bit different this time nyaa.

The difference between the me this time and the me's from before.

It must be the fact that I have a fully-fledged mission -- nyot a reason, which would befit an abnyormality, but a mission, something most unlike an abnyormality. Nyot that I knyow what it is yet, though.

But there must be something.

"Hmph. I see. You are some new species of abnormality, something that neither the Aloha brat nor I are well versed in -- but let us give you a light evaluation, shall we? To wit, the you in the now and the you hitherto are not unlike the *Terminator* and *Terminator 2*."

"That example's very easy to understand, but is it something a vampire like you should use...?"

She follows trends and fads. Unexpected nyaa.

Did that human bastard let her watch it nyaa?

"Well, whichever the case, my drawing of your blood is only a cure for the time being, or rather, something to tide you over, and nothing more. Not a hand you should be keen on using again and again."

"That's true nyaa."

I agreed nyan.

When it comes down to it, I of all people knyow best just how meaningless 'a

cure for the time being', a brute force solution is nyan.

Plus -- I musn't forget nyaa.

Though I'm coming out like this openly, I'm nyathing more than Mistress' innyer personyality, so I shouldn't be so open.

I should be scanty.

And stealthy nyan.

"Yet, the outside, and inside... but two sides to the same subject, they are. Well, perhaps I overstate, but at the least, you are like reversible garment. You seem to be one performing a fool's errand, much as my Lord does, or rather, two fools arguing in a circle."

"Hmn?"

"Well, this is but a trite story, the kind your Mistress has naturally filling her database with, but this is of my own recollection, with its own significance, so quiet down and listen. An anecdote of Napoleon I, this -- he slept for only three hours a day, says they."

"Ahh,"

True, that story is part of Mistress' knyowledge.

Actually, it's so famous, it's a story that anyone would knyow nyan -- even that illiterate human bastard would knyow nyaa.

It's actually pretty incredible, the way she said it's 'of her own recollection' nyan.

"So what nyan? Does that have anything to do with the way I'm coming out while Mistress is sleeping?"

"No, I did not mean to join the two. But, listen all the same."

"I'm listening nyan."

"Meanwhilst, the Emperor was famous for his love of baths. Spent more than six hours a day in it, says they. In this day and age, he would be Shizuka-chan."

"....."

We've gone from *Terminyator* to *Doraemon* nyaa...

Something's wrong with the way her knyowledge leans towards that one area nyaa.

"Of this matter much has already been said, but in time, even Shizuka-chan will be regulated... actually, she is well and truly under regulation already. And now that we are on this subject, it makes me recall how risqué the ED sequence of that nostalgic series *Perman* was. Pako always had her drawers out on full display... but I suppose that at this point, such spectacles as these were already being regulated, even before the proper laws were set. A sad tale, truly."

"Sorry to cut in while you're talking about this like it's someone else's business, but it's the ones like you for who regulations and laws are set nyan."

Begging his pardon, but it's probably nyot the time for her to be worrying about Mr Fujiko Fujio.[2]

"True, true. Aye, but I ramble."

"Yep. If this is what you had me shut up to listen to, it'll definitely get cut during the editing nyan."

But I still don't knyow what this vampire is trying to say nyan.

It's all ??? to me nyan.

How little the Emperor sleeps, and how long he bathes for, they're both famous stories nyaa -- they're nyot quite anecdotes when you get right down to it.

"Well. When I came to know of these stories, the thought occurred."

Said the vampire.

In a very dramatic tone.

"Come now, surely he must be sleeping in his bath!"

"....."

Ah.

I see, she's trying to connect the two anyecdotes -- putting aside the truth (according to Mistress' knyowledge, the Emperor would work on his government

affairs even in the bath) that's one way to see it nyan.

"Thus, by joining these two, in a way, unnatural inclinations and considering them together, one may reach an exceedingly rational conclusion. As one would add one minus to another to produce a plus, if you add one mystery to another, you may reach a proper conclusion. In short, what I am conveying is that the matters which you consider to be separate affairs could be connected in unexpected ways -- there is no meaning in considering the outside and the inside separately. Yes, you are Black Hanekawa, cut off from the personality of Hanekawa Tsubasa, that is not incorrect -- but there is no marked difference between the two."

Such is my belief.

Said the vampire -- with a terrible smile.

"From my eyes, abnormalities and humans are not so unlike one another."

"...I see."

Hearing her say that,

made me feel a bit at ease -- and very down nyaa.

I'm -- the same as Mistress, huh.

I already knyow that, I recognize that, I even claimed that myself -- but, nyow someone's actually saying it out loud.

"But... in that case, it's turning out like a worse and worse idea to let you suck my blood nyaa."

"That is true. Best of all is a natural death. Both from an expert's eye, and the abnormality."

"So, vampire,"

I said.

I thought of something -- after what the vampire just mentioned, I thought of something.

"If you want to thank me, how about answering one of my questions?"

"Hmn? I do not mind -- but do so with speed. I must hasten to return beneath

my Lord. The clock strikes nine, but he may not remain in that place -- quickly, lest the useless fool truly does get himself killed."

She looked like she was taking it easy, but apparently even she's being driven up the wall nyaa.

So I did as she said and got to the point.

"Do you knyow a tiger abnyormality?"

"A tiger?"

"Yeah, a tiger nyaa -- "

A tiger.

Mammal of the family Felinae, order of Carnivora.

"-- It's prowling around town right nyow."

"Of tiger abnormalities, there are numerous. Quite a few even from my own knowledge, but with what the Aloha brat knows -- "

There are easily over fifty, said the vampire.

Nyaaa.

That's a problem nyaa.

I don't even knyow that nyumber nyaa.

"Well, I knyow what Mistress knyows, too... but that's the thing, we can't figure out which one it really is nyaa. I knyow it's a really bad one, but when it comes to its true identity, I can't think of anything -- "

"Yes, to bestow one a name is to gain a hold on one's true identity -- be it I, Oshino Shinobu, or you, Black Hanekawa. Knowing not the name, seeing not its true form -- that is true terror. None can be more terrifying than the one who is none. Fear of an anonymous society, it did not begin in the present age. Are there no clues, besides being a tiger?"

"It's a big tiger nyaa."

"Most tigers are big. A small tiger would be more telling."

"Mmmmn, it's really fast nyaa. It got ahead of me in a flash nyaa."

"Most tigers are fast. An unmoving tiger would be more telling."

"Mmmmn, and it talked nyaa."

"Talked?"

The vampire reacted nyan.

And very clearly nyaa.

"A beast form abnormality, and yet it speaks -- that is, shall I say, rare. But I fear that hearing this has made its true form even more of a mystery."

The vampire said this, and stood up nyaa.

Her feet are stuck to the ceiling, so I guess 'stood up' is a weird expression to use nyaa.

And I guess you can say it was lady-like, or something, the way she skilfully clamped down on her skirt with her thighs to stop it from falling.

All her blonde hair got turned upside-down though nyaa.

"To start with, it cannot be that an unknown abnormality prowls this town without my knowing of it."

"Hmn?"

That's true, nyow that she mentioned it nyaa.

She may let small fry like me do as I please, but if a really powerful abnyormality like that thing was wandering around, there's no way it wouldn't catch the attention of this **No Life King** of abnyormalities nyan.

This iron-blooded, hot-blooded and cold-blooded vampire.

All abnyormalities are just a food supply for her, after all.

"...But still, it's nyot like you're still like that nyow, right? I don't really knyow, but since that human's in a tough spot, and your pairing got severed -- "

"All the more so. In such a predicament as this, I could not possibly fail to notice an abnormality -- this is a bolt from the blue. Hmm, actually seen this tiger, have you?"

"Oh, nyaa,"

That's, nyot true.

I did, but *before that* --

"Mistress saw it nyaa. So I did too."

"And hence -- that may be the point of contention. In short, *it was an abnormality beheld by none other than the two of you* -- a tiger only the two of you may see."

"....."

"Naught but a possibility. Forgive me for not being of help."

I shall consider again a way to show my thanks, said the vampire, who calmly walked along the ceiling and looked like she was about to leave the room through the window. She's probably heading to that tutorial school nyaa.

....Hmph, I thought.

She didn't manyage to tell me that abnyormality's true form, so there's nyo reason to cosy up to her any more, but -- it's true that I wasted her time nyaa.

On that front, I guess I'll return the favor.

It's nyot for that human though.

"Hey, vampire."

"What is it, cat."

"I'll get you there nyaa. It's just a skip for me to get to those ruins nyan."

"....."

"Don't be so cautious. I knyow you can't fly right nyow -- and your jumps aren't big enyough to be close to flying. It's nyot much trouble for me. But you can shave off thirty minutes."

".....Hmph."

Then the vampire,

hesitated for a second (actually, she just looked like she really didn't want to) but then she lightly fell from the ceiling and landed on the floor, or rather, the bed. It was really springy, so she ended up bouncing back up and flipping for no

reason, but it was pretty amazing how she still manyaged to land properly nyaa.

"May I rely on you?"

I thought that it was possible, very possible actually, that this proud vampire would reject my suggestion, but she pretty much made up her mind right away nyan.

I guess that's just how serious things are.

That's it nyan.

Nyow that I think about it -- although she didn't make much of it, having her pairing with that human severed isn't just a big deal, it's unbelievably bad news.

I mean, doesn't this mean he's lost his immortality?

Seeing as she's walking and sitting on the ceiling, maybe it means that, in reverse, her vampire traits are coming back -- but that bastard losing his immortality is really bad nyan.

Isn't his immortality how he even manyaged to survive this long?

And still, he...

"...Yeah, you can rely on me nyan."

I nyodded.

"But only as close as I can -- that's how Mistress feels nyaa. Even if that human's in a tough spot, she doesn't want to get in his way."

"Oh? -- I can't say it is something that woman would have spoken, but that is a good decision. Aye, she's suffered her share of pain this spring break, once and twice -- thanks to her conceited and thoughtless actions, my Lord was plunged in even direr straits."

"Mmn -- "

I remember that too nyan.

I didn't exist at the time, but -- I have that memory nyan.

The way I see it, she did more than just plunge him into direr straits, but well, that was more or less it, I guess nyan.

"To learn from one's own mistakes is an unavoidable step. Do as you please. This is enough as aid."

"Okay nyan."

I held the vampire.

Carrying her like a bride nyan.

As soon as I touched her, my Energy Drain activated, but the vampire didn't seem to mind.

What nerves nyaa.

I opened the window and put my foot on the windowsill. I'm barefooted as usual, but, well, I can just clean myself up when I get back nyan. Lucky enyough, this room has some of those wet tissues that the human uses to clean the room nyan (he likes cleaning nyan).

Nyow that I come to it, how did the vampire get in this room nyan? It crossed my mind suddenly, but I guess asking that about an abnyormality isn't going to go anywhere -- so I didn't think anything, and just jumped.

I flew.

Heading for Nyoble Minds Tutorial School -- but,

the vampire and I couldn't head for that building nyan -- although we at least manyaged to head for that place nyan.

I actually did aim for that area and jumped nyaa.

It's just that,

it's just that -- we couldn't reach it.

When we landed, arrived -- the building that should be there, the ruins of the tutorial school weren't there.

There's only some burnt bits and pieces.

The ruins of the tutorial school, where Araragi Koyomi and Oshino Shinobu had once hidden, where Oshino Meme had lived for several months, a place filled with memories for Mistress and Senjougahara Hitagi, for Kanbaru Suruga and Sengoku Nadeko -- were completely burnt down nyan.

Translator's Notes[edit]

1. Jump up ↑ The original: Shinobu refers to the Japanese proverb "*Edo no kataki wo Nagasaki de utsu*", literally 'striking in Nagasaki an enemy from Edo', which could mean either having an unexpected occasion to take revenge for past grievances, or attacking someone unrelated to make yourself feel better after a loss. Considering the situation, she is wrong with either one.
2. Jump up ↑ *Doraemon* and *Perman* (or *P-man*) are two classic manga series by Fujio Fujiko, where panty shots were quite often used as a humour device.

Nekomonogatari (White) : 052

What just happened?!

052?!

It's like we doubled our score in one night!

How can I not be worried about this?!

I can't just let this one go! I can't, I can't!

What on earth is going on while I'm sleeping?!

Just how big of an adventure was there for it to jump 25 chapters?!

That's a whole novel's worth of plot not being touched on!

"……"

And so on.

Well, putting aside that sort of tongue-in-cheek fourth-wall perspective — now that we had come this far, even I began to feel it unnatural.

When I was in bed in those ruins, well, that could be forgiven.

I felt that, just as anyone else would, I had a sense of attachment towards the bedding I worked hard to make, that overflowing sensation towards something homemade, and that helped me to compensate and sleep a deep sleep — and it was not unthinkable that, as I had spent the day before in such severe conditions, being at Senjougahara-san's home had a reversing effect and compensated for it, allowing me to sleep a deep sleep.

The former and the latter appeared to be contradictory, but when you consider them together, it was not impossible to consent to both points.

Just like those two episodes of Napoleon.

…However, putting aside when exactly I had thought of those episodes of the Emperor (it felt highly unlikely for them to be of my own conception —)

Sleeping soundly on Araragi-kun's bed?

Me?

Completely relieving me of all the day's stress?

Even mentally calming me down?

That was — just impossible.

Not that I wanted to put it this way, but I felt tense as soon as I got into the bed — shamelessly speaking, I was excited, and I could not sleep at all.

I was physically experiencing what Senjougahara-san had said about being unable to sleep in her father's bedding, and so, I could not sleep comfortably at all — not to mention that I was currently wearing Araragi-kun's pajamas.

You could even say I was feeling Araragi-kun over my entire body.

Speaking as a girl, the only deep sleep I could have like this would be one I never woke up from.

It might be an exaggeration to say I was completely unable to sleep, but all the same, it should have been quite shallow.

And yet — this feeling of refreshment.

An invigorating morning.

It was clearly — out of place.

It was clearly suspicious, and strange.

Clearly abnormal.

"….Hmmmn,"

I slowly rose and inspected myself — if something *had happened* to me, there must be some traces left over.

Was it just my imagination?

Was I simply more unabashed a person that I had thought, or not — I looked for some sort of proof.

Something must still remain.

And I found it immediately.

First, the pajamas I borrowed from Araragi-kun — aside from the soaking sweat that came from me during my sleep, there was a faint smell of earth.

The smell of 'earth' may be difficult to visualize, so perhaps it would be better to say the smell of *the outside*.

"…Did I leave the house while I was sleeping?"

Like a somnambulist?

Muttering to myself, I bent down and sat in an improper, cross-legged posture, just like doing calisthenics before a jog, and checked my feet this time — mainly, the soles.

But there was nothing there.

Just size 23.5 feet.

Beautiful, pure things.

"…But,"

Said I, and my eyes turned to the box of wet tissues on top of Araragi-kun's study desk (though it was likely a very recent event that it began to actually be used for studying).

As expected, it was slightly off from its position yesterday.

By about three millimeters.

I got off the bed, and peeked into the garbage can next to the desk. As I had predicted, there were a few diposed, used tissues in it — dirtied by earth and gravel and such.

As such, I looked at my own hands.

They were pure, just like the soles of my feet, but — that was not the case in the gaps between my fingernails.

A small amount of dirt was clinging to them.

An awfully wild sort of nail art.

"They say the proof of a crime lies in the fingernails… but this is no joke."

Saying this, I then headed towards the window.

Well, I could not be sure that I had left the room this way — but *thinking back to the incident during Golden Week*, I doubt I would have took the effort to conscientiously exit through the hall, down the stairs, and out the front door.

Being the closest exit, the window should be the most logical choice — and this speculation was proven correct, though only by pure luck, as the crescent lock of the window was left open.

I confirmed the night before that it had been locked, of course, before I went to bed.

It was an obvious precaution, after I had experienced just how angry Senjougahara-san could get at me — and yet, this.

In other words — someone opened the lock to this window while I was sleeping, and seeing as there was no one in this room but me, the one who opened the window could be none other than myself.

“Putting aside whether I’m a criminal or not, this does feel like I’m some culprit being cornered by a detective.”

In the first place, the culprits who appear in detective novels would never leave bits of evidence all over the place so conspicuously — not even the detective would be interested then. He would probably just leave the whole case to the officers of Scotland Yard — although,

unexpectedly, cases where the culprit was a *Bakeneko* were fitting enough for great detectives in the good old days — so I thought.

To deliver the final blow, I returned to the bed and held up the pillow.

It was Araragi-kun’s pillow — though that made no difference in this case.

If, when I had become *that*, I laid down for even just a moment —

“…There it is. The decisive piece of proof.”

I plucked out a single strand of hair from the pillow.

Hair is something which is constantly regrown regardless of gender, so a few strands will always fall out during sleep — though this was an obvious fact, the problem was that this strand was **white**.

White hair.

Or not — perhaps, in this case, it should be called white fur?

Yes, it was not like the hair from a human being, but the fur from an animal —

“So that’s it… I’m, turning again. Into the Hindering Cat… into Black Hanekawa.”

I did not want to believe it — or even consider it, but with the circumstances solidified to such a degree, it was pointless to escape from reality.

It was no good continuing to deny the truth, as I had done on the day before the Cultural Festival, even when cat ears were sprouting directly from my head — thinking this, the possibility suddenly hit upon me, and I confirmed my own appearance with the mirror on the desk.

It’s all right, they’re not growing out.

Not yet.

…I utterly digress, but it came to me that Araragi-kun, having a mirror equipped on his desk at all times, might surprisingly be something of a narcissist.

What a strange boy.

Well, pressing on.

“But, now that I’ve considered everything in order — besides the cat ears, this is pretty different from the time before, and the time before that. I didn’t get those telltale headaches, and I’m turning back to normal, even though Araragi-kun’s not here…”

It became all conjecture from this point on, but it was highly likely that, during the night I spent at the ruins, and the night I stayed over at Senjougahara-san’s home, I took on my ‘Black Hanekawa’ form — it was all conjecture, but I was 90% certain that I was correct.

Only this line of thought could explain my feeling of ‘freshness’, after all.

And yet — I was turning back.

I turned back into myself.

“Maybe I’m *getting used to turning* into Black Hanekawa… just like how

Araragi-kun learned to use his vampire immortality.”

Immortality…

I wonder why it was that some part of my mind got hung up on that word — hmm, it’s not very clear.

Honestly — what had happened while I was sleeping?

It was for certain that something had happened.

Something, extremely important…

“…But I can imagine why I’m turning into Black Hanekawa again — ”

The fire at my house.

It could be nothing else.

Black Hanekawa was the incarnation of my stress — my inner personality, embracing the emotions that I could not.

“I’m not just rampaging about to release my stress… if that were the case, the traces I left behind would be a lot more visible.”

I felt that this was just a hopeful observation, though.

At any rate, it gave me a bad feeling that there were blanks in my own memory.

“Oh, no… I wonder if Black Hanekawa-chan can take care of this stress.”

Playing the fool, I began to change.

There may be no point in escaping from reality, but confirming the reality of Black Hanekawa did not change the other fact that nothing could be done from my side under the present circumstances, so I had no choice but to go to school.

Neither Araragi-kun nor Oshino-san, the ones whom I ought to consult, were here.

Due to the anxiety of having my home burn down, I could simply be absent again — this did not escape me, but now that I had confirmed I was simply pushing said anxiety *onto someone else*, I found it difficult to do so.

And, to be honest, I wanted to ask Kanbaru-san whether she had managed to

meet Araragi-kun yesterday, and if he was safe — not knowing her phone number or e-mail address, I had no choice but to contact her directly if I wanted to ask her anything.

“I guess I can ask her through Senjougahara-san as well… but she’s sharp, so she might suspect that I’m turning into Black Hanekawa again.”

No.

Seeing as it’s her, Senjougahara-san might already be suspecting it.

I got the feeling she had insinuated something earlier…

Well.

Just as I was finishing changing,

“Hanekawa-san — !”

I was shocked by Tsukihi-chan’s voice coming from the other side of the door.

Oh, no.

Was I talking to myself so loudly, even though I was in someone else’s home?

Did she hear me?

Though that did not appear to be the case, thankfully, “Did you wake up yet — ? If not, then wake up now — ! It’s time for breakfast!”

as Tsukihi-chan continued.

“It’s a rule at the Araragi house for everyone to eat breakfast together — !”

“…Okay, got it — !”

I answered her.

“It’s all right, I’m up. I’ll be right there.”

“Okay — !”

Her lovely voice rang out, and I heard the sound of footsteps walking down the hall.

Huh.

That was something of a disappointment.

Araragi-kun had always expressed his sisters' morning routine of waking him up as 'beating him up', as though it was quite a bother, but what exactly was so bothersome about such a lovely act?

Geez, he shouldn't do that.

The way he put it, you'd mistaken believe he was attacked with crowbars in his sleep.

Thinking this, I confirmed my appearance with the mirror once again, with contact lenses in one hand for when I stop by the bathroom before heading down to the living room, and left Araragi-kun's room.

Nyah.

Like this:

Like Loading...

Nekomonogatari (White) : 053

They had a rule where everyone ate breakfast together.

…Though as far as I knew, this was a rule that Araragi-kun constantly broke, but there was no reason to question that right now.

He likely had not wanted to tell me, and I did not want to say it either, but it would seem that gauging the amount of distance there ought to be between himself and his family was awkward for him — how much he distanced himself from Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan did not need to mentioned, but not even his father and mother were exempt.

But, well, after taking into account the new information regarding both his parents being police officers, I felt there was a slightly different implication to this.

First, his mother.

Before I went to school — it's further than the middle school attended by Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan, so I left about thirty minutes beforehand — I stopped at the entrance, said 'I'm off', and raised my hand toward the doorknob,

"Hanekawa-chan,"

but then,

she raised her voice.

"I don't know what sort of situation your family is in, and I'm not thinking of asking you about it now, but please don't think that, right now, without your parents by your side, it's normal for you to say, 'I'm off' while you are leaving our home. At the very least, please don't think that."

"……"

"We can treat you as a guest, but we can't become your family. No matter how much Karen and Tsukihi want you as their sister. Oh, but don't get me wrong — you're not troubling us. Karen and Tsukihi are happy, too — and you're

Koyomi's friend, so we want to do as much for you as we can. After all, from what I hear from him, you were the reason he started studying seriously."

"…That's,"

not true, I answered.

I don't know how to put it, but Araragi-kun's mother — she resembled him, but I felt that her eyes belonged to someone who had reached some sort of enlightenment.

Like she had achieved something.

I saw the way she was, and even taking away the part about being a police officer, I got the feeling I understood why he found it so hard to deal with his mother.

"I'm sorry. I must have made you worry somehow — but my family isn't too much of a problem. We just, well, you could say we don't get along well…"

We were in discord, you could say.

We were distorted, you could say.

"…that's all."

"Parents not getting along with their child, that's nearly abuse in itself, you know."

That's why.

Said Araragi-kun's mother.

"Always look for help whenever you're in trouble. It doesn't matter if it's public service, or even Koyomi. He can be dependable in his own way."

"Yes…"

I — knew that.

I knew very well, just how dependable Araragi-kun could be.

I had always known — and yet,

I tried my very hardest not to depend on him.

I got on without depending on him.

“It’s not wrong to not have a family, but if you do, it should be something you’re glad for. That’s what I believe. As a mother.”

“As — a mother.”

“Hanekawa-chan, when bad things happen to people, it’s all right for them to run as far away as possible, but it’s not running if you just turn your eyes away from it. As long as you say that your situation is fine, no one from outside can do a thing — but how about you try just **going for it** first?”

With these words, Araragi-kun’s mother showed me out — it was quite a long, ‘take care’.

Goodness.

Powerful people, really, mothers — that was the humorous impression I got.

I felt like I had been beaten and bruised.

But it was not a bad feeling.

…’Mother’, huh.

That — was something I had no concept of, even at this age.

I wondered.

What exactly had I been doing all this time?

Not just at night — but in the afternoon, in the morning.

“Turning my eyes away from it isn’t the same as running away — huh. Deep words.”

I felt completely moved.

Rather than Araragi-kun, those words felt more like something Oshino-san would say.

As such, I headed to school while continuing to contemplate those words — but, along the way, I found myself face-to-face with a sight that, quite aptly, I wanted to ‘turn my eyes away from.’

No, really, I almost wanted to turn around on the spot and walk back the way I came.

A boy with golden hair and golden eyes was walking on the same path as mine — from his height he seemed to be around the same age as me, but judging from his baby face, with some vestige of youth still clearly remaining but not enough to be described as child-like, he looked to be a middle schooler.

However, for a middle school boy — his eyes, those golden eyes that appeared to constantly be glaring forward, were far too ill-natured.

Although — perhaps, unlike spring break,

it was already an improvement, appearance-wise, that he was not shouldering a gigantic silver cross.

"…Um,"

I really had considered changing my direction, but just before I could make the decision, he had noticed me.

With a 'hmph.'

Those far too ill-natured golden eyes perceived me.

Our eyes met,

seeing each other perfectly.

"Whoa, whoa, you — uh, what was it — yeah, you were the one from a while back who nearly got killed by me. Heh heh — that was hilarious."

He,

the half-vampire vampire hunter — Episode, said this, and pointed at me, looking overjoyed.

"…Hello."

I bowed slightly.

"It's been quite a long time… Episode-san."

He did not seem to be troubled by any of the conflicting emotions I felt — but to me, this was very unpleasant, something which I could do nothing to help, and the tone of my words clearly conveyed this.

But I suppose it was not surprising.

As he said, it was just a while ago — just during spring break, when I was nearly killed by him.

Not that it would be an exaggeration to say that he *did* kill me — he had blown away half of my internal organs, after all.

Originally, he had come to this city in pursuit of Shinobu-chan, the legendary vampire, and ended up dueling Araragi-kun, who had become kin to Shinobu-chan — it was a very painful incident.

It had been my fault, unapologetically intruding in a duel between two men, but he was rather unapologetic himself.

“I heard that you went back to your own country soon after that… why have you come to this town again, Episode-san?”

I asked him timidly.

It occurred to me that he might have come back in order to try and ‘exterminate’ Araragi-kun or Shinobu-chan again — that this could be cause for the trouble Araragi-kun was now embroiled in.

Oshino-san, as the specialist, should have settled things on that end — but Oshino-san wasn’t all-powerful, either.

He might have made a mistake somewhere and exposed the two of them — but against my question, the half-vampire (fine even while under the sun, and able to move about in daytime) widened his grin, and,

“That’s hilarious.”

said this, laughing fiendishly.

“Don’t call me ‘Episode-san’ — I’m not the age for that kind of stuff, and not in a position to hear that kind of polite talk.”

“Huh?”

But he was a vampire, even if just a half — should his lifespan not be fairly long then?

“Just ’cause my lifespan’s long doesn’t mean I’m actually old, you know. You’re hilarious. It’s actually a secret, but it’s pretty funny so I’ll tell you. You’re actually

a lot older than me — by now, I'd be six years old."

"Six?!"

My shock was clear.

As though that was the response he had expected, Episode-san… no, Episode-*kun* wore a happy expression.

"It's my birthday next month, so I'll be seven then — my parent on my vampire side was a type of abnormality that matured really quickly, and I've got traces of that."

"……"

"Anyway, don't judge a person just by how they look — well, not that I'm a 'person.'"

Episode-kun then brought the conversation to a close, so I had no way to confirm the authenticity of this.

It just felt like he was playing with me.

On the topic of not judging someone by how they look, though, I did not want him to explain his age, so much as I wanted him to answer why he was wearing a white, long-sleeved school uniform, just as he had done during spring break, despite the blazing August sun.

Perhaps he could not feel heat, as a half-vampire.

I see…

So he wasn't a high schooler or a middle schooler, but a grade schooler in terms of age, younger than even Shinobu-chan or Mayoi-chan…

It would not even be odd to call him 'Episode-chan' rather than 'Episode-kun' by mistake, so he didn't really have a baby face, but in fact looked older than he was.

I could not deny feeling that a hidden character trait was just revealed at this late stage for no particular reason.

Talk about your 'nonexistent youth.'

"Oh, and why aren't you carrying your cross?"

“Huh? Yeah. Duh. I’d kind of stand out if I walked around carrying that.”

Hmph.

It would seem that he did have some mindfulness regarding this, in some measure at least.

“…So, can you answer me now on why you’ve come to this town again?”

“Huh — ? You’re pretty fussy, aren’t you? Well, I do owe you one, so I was going to answer you anyway.”

Said Episode-kun.

Apparently, he considered ‘having tried to kill me’ as ‘owing’ me.

I felt slightly relieved.

“But I don’t even know why I’m here yet. I suddenly got called out and just arrived by the night bus — ”

“The night bus…?”

That was oddly mundane of him.

What was he, a tourist?

“Anyway, you said you were called out?”

“Yeah, that happens too. I’m more or less a freelance vampire hunter. Not like Dramaturgie or Guillotine-cutter. I’m just a mercenary working for my own gains, and anyone who can pay can hire me.”

“You take jobs without hearing the contents first?”

“I get paid in advance. Besides, I couldn’t refuse this time. Well, the contents of the job makes no difference. You leave someone to me, whoever he is, and I’ll kill him so dead there won’t be anything left to treat.”

“…So, would you take a contract to exterminate a tiger?”

“A tiger?”

Surprised, Episode-kun’s face went blank.

“Uh… actually, I’m a hunter specialized in vampires, so a tiger’s a bit… what, did your general tell you to do something crazy?”

“My general…?”

Why did he know the story of Ikkyu Sojun?

I suppose the anime, which was recommended by the Ministry of Education, was popular even overseas.

Hmm.

In the end, no answer came for my question (I had wanted to get an answer from him any way I could, but if he didn’t actually know it couldn’t be helped), although I did feel that it was surprisingly easy talking with him.

Much had happened during spring break between him and Araragi-kun, so even though we only came in contact for several minutes, I already had some impression of what kind of character Episode-kun apparently was in advance — but now, meeting him under the sun, it came to me that he was this kind of person.

This was what people meant by, ‘something that appeared like ethereal, only to be whithered grass.’

He was an almost disappointingly normal boy.

While it was impossible to see him as only six or seven years old, talking with him on the roadside like this really felt as though I was dealing with a younger boy.

The white school uniform was just a kind of fashion, the product of his self-consciousness —

“But, still. You, Hanekawa Tsubasa, was it?”

However,

it would seem that, in his own way — he had a similar thought to mine.

“Compared to before, it’s like you — got really *normal*.”

“…Huh?”

His words, frank and without any embellishment, reveberated within my heart.

“That’s why, earlier, I — even with the ‘sight’ of a vampire, I couldn’t tell who you were for a second. Not just how you cut your hair or lost your glasses or

stuff like that, but something more deep down — before, you felt really, how should I put it, really intimidating, or something like that. But it's totally gone now, disappeared. Or maybe I should say it got cut off from you, without leaving any scars behind — ”

“……”

I knew what he was trying to say.

It was something I had not considered until I had been told, though — after all, the me that Episode-kun knew, was the me from spring break.

It was the me from back when Black Hanekawa had not yet been born inside me — the me from before I had cut that dark part of myself away as an abnormality.

That was why — but, wait.

Just hold on.

Becoming normal, or becoming not intimidating, that sounded just like —

Speaking of which, I recalled what Karen-chan had told me in the bath yesterday.

You really aren't pretentious at all, are you, Tsubasa-san — however,

that was not because I did not pretend, but because I *could not* pretend — I could not possibly pretend when I had already cut my own individuality away from myself, so it would of course stand to reason —

No, no.

That's wrong. That's even worse.

It would be — *a bad idea*, to consider this further.

Most likely — this line of thought led — to a truth that I would shield my eyes from —

“Oh,”

As though what he had just said was something he just wanted to mention for no real reason despite it being a shocking statement to me, Episode-kun seemed to have lost interest in the matter and, looking over my shoulder, discovered

something.

With his vampire sight or whatnot,

he saw someone behind me.

“That’s her, right there — the one who called me out without even saying what it was about. Well, when I asked, it turns out she’s the senior of that aloha bastard, that Oshino Meme guy, when he was in university — seeing as we have a connection like that, I just couldn’t turn her down — ”

And I — turned around.

Like this:

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 054

She called herself Gaen Izuko.

With those big clothes on her small body, she looked liked a lady just about worn out of shape — of course, having failed to perceive Episode-kun's age just moments before, I no longer felt much confidence in making guesses on anybody's age.

I would have believed it if I had been told that she was in her twenties, but if she really was Oshino-san's senior, then she must be over thirty at the least, though to be honest, she looked to me like she was in her teens.

Actually, despite all that I have said, she seemed so full of composure that trying to determine her age seemed rather meaningless — she possessed an air of aloofness.

Imagine that, if an excellent work of art were plopped down before her, she would think it unrefined and meaningless to consider the time, era, place in the world it had been created in, or perhaps even who its creator had been — she held that sense of resoluteness which permitted no dissent.

As such, despite her clothes being worn out of shape, she appeared splendid — while if a normal person tried wearing XL-size clothes on an S-size physique, it would simply give the impression of someone with a 'loose' sense of fashion, frankly, it looked refined on her.

Although she wore her baseball cap sideways and stomped on her sneakers like they were flats, it looked neither rough nor unrefined, but utterly as though it was an aspect of her personal fashion.

"Hey, Sode — you never got to our meeting place so I came to pick you up. When I did, it turned out you were hitting on someone. Sorry for the interruption."

That was the first thing I heard from her.

She said this with a charming smile.

The way she spoke felt very off — like she was somehow providing a detailed exposition on her own actions.

It felt like she was trying to cover this sensation with her smile.

“Hmmn? Oh? And this is…?”

Then, she looked at me.

“…Hanekawa, Tsubasa-san… isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes — ”

Being told this before I had even named myself — I was taken aback.

Of course, I had already been shocked after being taught by Episode-kun that she was Oshino-san’s senior — and even if she did hear about me from Episode-kun or Oshino-san, there should have been no way she could have known I was Hanekawa Tsubasa now that I had cut my hair. Not without something like a vampire’s ‘sight’, at least.

” — I am.”

“My, my, this is unexpected. Thanks to me deciding on a whim to actually act for once, I got a chance to meet you. That makes me very happy, Tsubasa-chan. I doubt Meme said anything, but I am someone called Gaen Izuko. I was his senior. He called me Gaen-senpai. A lot of cases where I’m called ‘Senpai,’ me.”

Said she.

She really did have a strange way of speaking, if I could put it that way.

Actually, this was all-in-all a somewhat strange self-introduction.

“Don’t saying I’m hitting on her, Gaen-san — I just saw someone really nostalgic and went for a stroll down memory lane with her.”

Said Episode-kun, appearing displeased (though it was surprising to me that he actually did ‘just’ want to do that) but Gaen-san said, “Well, that doesn’t make any difference.”

It really did seem to make no difference to her.

“Once you’re done that stroll or whatnot, what say we go — we’re racing against the clock here, hour by hour. Yotsugi should be here before long, but we

haven’t got time to wait.”

“Yotsugi? Who’s that?”

“It doesn’t matter to you, Sode. Though that’s not the case for everyone, and it’s not the case for me. Well, to be honest, I thought that Meme or Deishuu would come. But those two just can’t help being wanderers. I don’t want Yotsuru here, by the way, not in the slightest.”

“You really do only talk for your own sake, don’t you — don’t just start talking like everyone already understands what you’re going on about.”

Episode-kun did not attempt to hide his discontent but, as though this reaction were of no concern to her,

“Tsubasa-chan,”

Gaen-san said to me.

There was too much liberty in the way she talked.

“Normally, I would be trying to get myself involved into your conversation with Sode, maybe even buy you both juice from the vending machine if you were so inclined, seeing as I’m the adult here, but the situation is as you’ve just heard. Sorry, but I’ll be taking Sode with me.”

“Oh… right.”

I did not mind that.

In fact, if she were to take him away, inside, I would feel like patting my own chest in relief — all things being considered, he was still rather scary (actually, the memory of the moment when I had been killed escaped me, but my body remembered. My stomach hurt.) and I was in the middle of my way to school, which I still had to go to.

It would more troublesome if she *had* offered me juice.

“So I can’t give you any help on your tiger problem at the moment. You’ll have to do something by yourself.”

“Huh?”

My — tiger problem?

Wait… why does she…?

She must have heard me when I was talking to Episode-kun from before — no, that would be quite a contrivance, given her distance.

It would be a contrivance — though on somehow another level compared to when she had guessed my name before.

And it felt different from mind-reading.

I had not thought about the tiger while talking with Gaen-san, after all.

“Hm? Why the strange look? It’s not that surprising that I know about the tiger, is it? There’s nothing I don’t know.”

“Nothing — you don’t know.”

“Yeah.”

She said,

“I know everything.”

brimming with confidence.

As though she really did know —

As though she had a grasp on the entire story,

she said.

“Well, you’ll be facing off against that tiger by today or tomorrow, I’m sure. Soon, you yourself will name it, that abnormality with unprecedented, unparalleled power, the **Inflaming Tiger**. But no one will help you. You will be saved by no one. Because it is your own problem. It is not my problem, nor the problem of the boy you love.”

“Wha — ”

I lost my words at ‘what’.

The boy I love?

“I mean Araragi-kun. You’re not saying you don’t know him, are you?”

Gaen-san said, as though this were something extremely obvious and part of common knowledge — as though it were something anyone besides me would

know.

In fact,

“You really don’t know anything, do you, Tsubasa-chan — ”

she said this as though she was looking down on me, as though she was scorning me.

As though she pitied me — as though she sympathized with me.

As though she was looking at a pathetic child,

she said.

(I can’t think of a way to translate the pun in the next line into English. Sorry.)

“You don’t even know that you don’t know anything. You’re ignorant (無知 muchi) to your own ignorance in being ignorant, I suppose. Ahaha, if I keep repeating ‘ignorance’ like that, it sounds like I’m talking about your curvy and busty (むちむち muchimuchi) body. Lewd, isn’t it? I’m the slim type, so it’s really something to be envious about.”

“……”

“That being said, it would be better to not know than to know you don’t know — even the brainless scarecrow had lamented nothing could be more unbearable than knowing the truth that you were a fool.”

“…What do you,”

I said. My voice was shaking.

I did not know why my voice shook.

Even when I had been facing Episode-kun during spring break — my voice, my body did not shake like this.

“What do you — think you know about me?”

“I know everything. And that’s why,”

I know everything, repeated Gaen-san.

Again and again.

As though she had repeated that line many times before.

As though she were simply saying ‘good morning’ or ‘good night’ or ‘thanks for the meal’ or ‘I’m done eating’.

Repeating.

Repeatedly.

Repeating.

“I know that you don’t know anything. But that’s nothing to be ashamed of, because nobody in this world knows anything. They live on, lying while unknowing. You are not an exception, nor are you special.”

“Not an exception — not special.”

“You like it when people tell you that, don’t you?”

Said Gaen-san.

Of course, as though she was looking down on me.

“I know.”

“……”

“And naturally, I know all about the ruins of that tutorial school, that memorable place for all of you including Meme, burning up last night… ahh, and once again, I speak of information you do not yet know. Isn’t that right, ‘I-Know-Nothing’ Tsubasa-chan?”

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 055

Kanbaru-san was absent.

I ended up more or less rushing into the classroom just before the first bell rang (metaphorically speaking, of course, I would never run in the hallways. It was already quite — no, already very suspicious to be moving like I was in some speed-walking competition.) so I only visited the second-year classroom of Kanbaru-san during the recess after the first period.

“Oh, Hanekawa-san.” “It’s Hanekawa-senpai.” “Oh, it really is Hanekawa-senpai!” “The one Kanbaru-san is always talking about.” “It’s Hanekawa-san, Senjougahara-san’s classmate.” “No, Hanekawa-senpai’s the one who helped Araragi-senpai.”

…I was exceedingly well-known, for some reason.

I felt like hiding my face and running away, but managed to hold fast and asked about Kanbaru-san — and the response was as mentioned above.

It seemed there had not been any contact from her, not to her homeroom teacher, nor to her friends in the class (obviously though it might seem once I had considered it, it was a relief to find out that Kanbaru-san did actually have friends in her own year).

“Kanbaru-san’s a very diligent student, so it’s really rare for her to be absent without leave… we’re all very worried about her.”

“……”

It is often the case that the same person can gain different reputations within different communities, but there is an immense difference between the image Kanbaru-san had and, above all else, the image we had of her.

……No.

That was probably the way things should be.

It would be strange for someone to look the same regardless of the observer, like something stamped out — someone like me.

It was not obvious.

And it was not normal.

Someone who appeared to be an honor student to anyone who was looking — that was abnormal.

“Have you heard anything, Hanekawa-san?”

“Being asked this,

“No.”

was the only thing I could say.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know anything.”

Those words seemed to have had a rather cold ring to them, as the girl looked to be in utter doubt, and I retreated from Kanbaru-san’s classroom, feeling embarrassed.

Due to this, unfortunately for my teacher, practically nothing entered my head during the second period’s lesson — I was worried, after all.

Araragi-kun was, of course, absent as well. Just what had happened last night?

Well, truthfully speaking, nothing entered my head starting from the first period — after hearing from Gaen-san about Noble Minds Tutorial School burning down, I could not remain calm.

It was unthinkable that the place we were so fond of, not to mention where Araragi-kun and Kanbaru-san were supposed to meet, would be beset by fire.

Naturally, after I had parted with Gaen-san and Episode-kun, I checked the news online on my cellphone and confirmed that it was not a lie.

There was even an image attached.

A photo of that bare concrete building collapsed in a miserable pile entered my view — that memorable place where so much had happened.

It was now completely gone from this world.

I was wondering what Senjougahara-san would think if she found out about this, not to mention being taken by an extreme sense of the impermanence of

the world, but on the other hand, when I took into account the current situation, it was clear that this was no time to be so sentimental.

What on earth — happened last night?

Are Araragi-kun and Kanbaru-san all right?

I was so worried that I could not sit still during lessons or recesses.

…And yet — the fact that I was able to continue taking lessons for the entire day without leaving early meant that, somehow, I firmly believed the both of them to be safe.

I found within myself the will to assert that those two were not hurt in the fire.

At first, I had not been sure if I could trust this feeling.

Perhaps I had simply believed in Araragi-kun and Kanbaru-san, that they could overcome any difficulties and, as such, did not need me to worry for them.

But that was *not* the case. It was not even worth considering.

Araragi-kun was simply a boy whom I could not calmly watch over from a distance in that way, as he was always involved in things possibly fatally dangerous, and he inclined towards not so much self-sacrifice as self-punishment. It was precisely because I knew him so well that it was hard for me to imagine him being safe in a situation like that.

And Kanbaru-san, unfortunately, was not so close to me that I could just simply trust in her safety (and considering the case with Senjougahara-san, I might even be seen as an enemy).

Why was it that I could be so sure of their safety — at the very least, in terms of my conviction that they had not been victims of the fire,

"…It's because I know."

I murmured.

I was on my way back from school.

Well, this was not the 'way back', to be exact — I was not returning to the Araragi house, but making a side trip.

"Yes, because *I know* — I know the fire that started had nothing to do with

Araragi-kun or Kanbaru-san.”

I knew.

I didn’t know.

But the me who wasn’t me knew.

It was most likely that, yesterday night — when I had become Black Hanekawa, I had seen it, and I knew. I knew that the two of them were safe. I knew that after Araragi-kun and Kanbaru-san had met, they changed to another location — I knew that it was, *more or less*, an unrelated problem to the fire.

It was as Gaen-san had said.

This — was my case.

“… Besides, the fire’s — something to do with me as well.”

Three days ago, the Hanekawa house burnt down completely.

And yesterday, Noble Minds Tutorial School was in flames.

In just three days — two buildings that had been deeply connected with me had burnt down.

It would be absurd not to think of these two events as being connected.

Not to mention that both cases occurred immediately after I had seen the tiger — I could not help worrying about that.

Also, the cause of the fire at the Hanekawa house was unknown, and as far as I could tell from the news report online, the fire at the tutorial school was similarly of unknown origin. Seeing as they were both places usually without traces of fire, it was all the more reason to suspect arson —

“Arson… huh.”

The worst possibility passed through my mind.

The possibility that I, as Black Hanekawa, was the criminal. In other words, an arsonist.

Thinking back to the outrageous violence committed by Black Hanekawa during Golden Week, it was a perfectly realistic possibility.

To be certain, it was not true that I had not wished many times for the Hanekawa house to ‘just disappear’ — and in this situation, I could not deny that said wish had been granted.

You might even say the possibility was quite high.

However, I felt that this was incorrect.

Not, that something like this happening was impossible — but the part about this being ‘the worst’.

I could not put it into words, but I got the feeling that an even worst conclusion was already prepared further along in this story. A conclusion that I had been turning my eyes away from — as though it was relentlessly lying in wait for me, its jaws held wide open.

Yes, the truth.

An inconvenient truth — was lying in wait for me.

That was the path I now walked.

“Now would be the time — to turn back, I guess.”

Right now.

If I could close my eyes — turn my eyes away just for a little while,

if I could just make it to tomorrow, I would be able to go on without encountering the truth.

Thing would be as per usual.

I would be able to continue as the Hanekawa Tsubasa I had always been.

As the best friend of Araragi-kun, as Hanekawa Tsubasa — as myself,

I would be able to remain.

Without any change.

“…But,”

But.

But, but.

I did not know what Araragi-kun was fighting against right now.

However, he was unmistakably fighting against something — together with Mayoi-chan and Kanbaru-san, and lending the aid of Shinobu-chan, putting his life on the line as always.

In that case, I too shall fight.

If it did not mean running away, then I would not turn my eyes away, either.

Now was the time to come face-to-face — for me, and my own heart which had been cut off from me.

This — was probably that kind of story.

“Yes… that tiger,”

It was on that day when the new trimester started.

I was on my way to school when I saw — that giant tiger.

“All of this started after I saw that tiger.”

That was the feeling I got.

I could not be certain at all.

But I *was*.

I knew.

“Gaen-san called it… the Inflaming Tiger, didn’t she?”

That would be the first angle of approach.

I had reached the library.

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 056

It would be boasting of my city, but the library of the town we lived in was exceedingly rich in content. Our town being the size it was, it prided itself on the amount of books it had collected and, perhaps due to the librarian's tastes or a penchant for the traditionalistic, its shelves were filled by sectarian works in place of best-sellers, giving the air of a museum instead of some local library.

I digress, but back when Oshino-san stayed in this town, I relied upon and borrowed books from here many times (as Oshino-san was not a resident, he could not procure a library card).

Although a fatal flaw existed in that it would close on Sundays, I always passed by this library when I was a child. While I had never sat myself down next to a wall to study, in terms of the necessary lessons of life, you could say I had learnt them all here.

All the things that my parents had not taught me.

I learnt them at this library.

All by myself.

More recently, this place was repeatedly used as Araragi-kun's study, but even when it was Senjougahara-san's turn to be Araragi-kun's tutor, I would still come by here.

To be honest, by the time I was fifteen I had read most of the books collected here, but because I liked the atmosphere, the air of this establishment, I would come here even when I had no need to.

Not to mention that it was just the best place to study.

And while it might not be "my home", it was one of the places where I would feel at ease.

Of course, I had not come here today "without need" — I came to do research.

"Hello, Tsubasa-chan."

"Good afternoon. I'll be having a look around."

Greeting the library worker I knew by sight, I started by picking out five books which had been reliable in the past, and sat myself down on a chair by the window that was more or less my designated seat.

The task of converting entire book catalogues into digital databases, currently being advanced by various libraries, had not yet taken place here, meaning I had to investigate each book one by one.

They were all of them books I had once read before, but not even my memory was perfect and, to begin with, my memory could not be relied upon in this case.

After all, I was able to take things inconvenient to myself and cut them away from my heart.

That was what I had done.

To phrase it like Araragi-kun's mother, I would *turn my eyes away* from things as I pleased.

Even the events of Golden Week, all those things I had done had been completely forgotten by me, and even now, I could not recall them entirely — no, it was more likely because I did not want to recall them.

I pushed these painful memories and tearful stress away from myself.

I pushed them away — onto Black Hanekawa.

…That was why my memories, my knowledge, and even my thoughts could not be relied upon at all — still, if I wanted to do something about this, if I still wanted to continue my vain struggle, I had no choice but to go wall-to-wall like this.

Line by line, word by word,

without turning my eyes away,

I had no choice but to read, to burn it all into my eyes.

"……Mmn,"

However, despite lingering until nearly the closing hour of the library — despite fishing through not just the first five, but in the end fifteen specialist works, there was not a single book that described the apparition, the

abnormality called the Inflaming Tiger.

Having considered that it might have been my own mishearing, I took care to watch for similarly-named phantoms — for example, the **Flaming Tiger**, which seemed quite possible seeing as it caused the phenomenon of fire — but that was a miss (I did find the related *Water Tiger*, but that was basically just a *Kappa*, which was of even less relevance).

Hmph.

It had been done with the best of intentions, but ending up with results like these was truly pathetic.

I had been entirely under the impression that I would be able to simply refer to a large variety of references, as suitable for the topic, much as Oshino-san would do… but things did not go quite so smoothly.

In fact, was it really so impossible that there had actually been a proper description of the abnormality, and I simply overlooked it? The possibility that it had been written there, but I, not wanting to know, had turned my eyes away from it —

"…But if I start thinking like that, I just can't trust anything, anymore."

No.

Me being the way I was, nothing about my state of affairs could be trusted in the first place. I was trying to do something about this — trying to help in the midst of such a situation.

If nothing could be trusted, then I could instead employ said untrustworthiness.

If the library was of no help, I could try searching on the Internet, but to be honest, I was reluctant to attempt that approach. The Internet was an excellent medium for gathering facts on what was occurring right now, but there were far too many mistakes to be found when searching for information from the past.

More to the point, it was weak in terms of tales of the abnormal.

That being said, I might be able to find some sort of clue, and seeing as I had no other plans, there was no point in maintaining a prejudice against digital

information — it was an approach that Oshino-san, who disliked machinery, would be incapable of, after all.

As I was inside a library, I had turned my phone off, but perhaps I could try searching once I got back outside.

Having made a decision, I went to return all the books I had picked out. I did not know just how correct my own memories were, but this at least was a simple task, as though I had memorized the location of all the books in this library.

“Are you by yourself today, Tsubasa-chan?”

Along the way, another worker, not the one who had greeted me, said this. She had seen Araragi-kun and I together many times before, so that was probably what she had meant with the question. She seemed to be under the impression that Araragi-kun and I were a couple, and, well, Araragi-kun did not seem to notice, so I did not attempt to correct this.

“Yes, I’m by myself today.”

As noted previously, I had been here by myself many times before, but it would seem I had not been very noticeable then (to this person’s eyes, at least).

“Hmm. Well, it’s almost closing time, are you done looking?”

“Yes, I’m done.”

There had been no results, but I certainly was done in terms of searching.

The worker glanced at the books I carried which I was returning to the shelves, and said, “that looks heavy.”

“I suppose once digital books have spread, people won’t have to worry about that weight anymore. Well, if it came to that, I suppose even the necessity of libraries would be in question.”

“I don’t know about that. I think it’ll be fine for now, as long as digital books never go beyond being computer images. Books are books, weight and all… books aren’t flat, but three-dimensional. Even if digital books do spread, just like how a collector of figurines would never say that ‘it’s enough to have just the photos’, it’s the bindings that truly makes the books, I think.”

The thought of digitalizing books was ridiculous.

It would be better to consider books and digital books in the same way as one would consider books and films — not as a transition, not as a progression, but in fact as a new species.

“Well, I hope so.”

As though she did not want to become involved in a deep discussion with some high schooler, the worker laughed lightly, looked at the titles of the books I was carrying,

“Are you interested in ghosts?”

and asked me, sounding mystified.

Well, they certainly did not appear to be books a dainty high school girl would devote herself to reading, so perhaps it truly was mystifying. The more experienced workers were already aware of my (indiscriminate) tastes in reading, but the one before me was still a newcomer.

“Yes, somewhat — it’s for a school project.”

Of course, I could not explain everything, so I dodged the question with a vague, uninteresting response.

“In that case, there’s something in the New Books section on that. Have you read it yet?”

“No — not yet.”

Not that she mentioned it, I had not checked there.

“There’s probably no time to read it now, but you can take it out.”

“Yes, I think I’ll do that.”

Although I said this, my expectations were low.

It would simply be too convenient for information on the abnormality I seeked to be on the very last book which I was just about to overlook — then again, as the saying went, it did not hurt to try.

I borrowed the book recommended to me and left the library.

“…Hm? Wait a second. A… new book, huh.”

New book — new species.

When I put the borrowed book into my bag, it suddenly occurred to me — wait, no, it would be strange to say it occurred to me.

Gaen-san had said it at the very beginning, after all.

The abnormality that I would myself name —

“If there hasn’t been a single hint, even after this much searching… then what if, like Black Hanekawa, that tiger is a *new species of abnormality* — “

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 057

All that was needed was a trigger, for the rest to start falling into place.

It was a keyword literally becoming a key which, once realized, made it completely unnecessary to flaunt copious references.

In fact, it was something I ought to have arrived at when I had first heard the words from Gaen-san.

Yes, I did not even need go to the library, as it was a piece of writing that could be found in middle school language textbooks — an idiom that anyone would have heard of at least once.

No fiercer a tiger than the inflaming of tyranny.

A verse from the Book of Rites, Tangong 2.

I doubt this is necessary but, to explain as a refreshment, here is the story.

There was once a woman whose father-in-law and husband had been eaten by ferocious, man-eating tigers, and then even her son was eaten. When asked why she would not leave this place, the woman answered thus: “It is better to have fierce beasts, than a country dominated by the rule of tyrants” — tyranny here certainly meaning the unyielding rule of heavy taxation and conscription and such, or put simply, of tyrants.

If things were as Gaen-san had said and I would name that tiger the ***Inflaming Tiger*** — then that phrase would unmistakably be the source. This was because, when I first found out about those words as a primary schooler, I had strongly felt that it was ‘not true at all’, and could not quite understand them.

Any sort of rule would be better than man-eating tigers — so I had thought.

It was not because I was a child who could not grasp the subtleties of the text. At the time, what I had found most unacceptable, the one thing I truly could not understand, were the feelings of the mother, the woman who would push her own ideology onto not only her father-in-law and husband but even her own child.

Of course, now that I have learnt about vicious forms of government far more cruel than tigers, it could not be said that I did not understand her feelings at all — but the sensation, of not quite understanding her, remained.

“That’s why, I think, the Inflaming Tiger isn’t just a simple abbreviation of ‘no fiercer a tiger than the inflaming of tyranny’, but actually ‘*a fiercer tiger than the inflaming of tyranny*‘, making it is a tiger beyond tigers, like a **tyrant of tigers**. What do you think?”

Said I.

Hearing my hypothesis at the other end of the phone, Senjougahara-san remained silent for a moment and then responded negatively with, “I wonder about that”.

And very blatantly negatively, as well.

“It just feels to me as though you are being led around by the nose. This ‘Gaen’ — as I hear it, it wasn’t you at all who named the abnormality. It was obviously her.”

“Yes, well, that’s true.”

That was more difficult to explain.

It did not seem to be in the nature of the person called Gaen Izuko, the one who had called herself Oshino-san’s senior, to allow others to understand through her words — to be honest, even I, who had seen, met, and talked to her face-to-face, did not fully understand her.

I could not possibly explain it.

However, there was simply no clear reason for her to lead me on at all — unlike the clear reason with which Senjougahara-san had led the Fire Sisters on.

To her,

I was someone of no concern — to be pushed to the wayside.

“How could we understand something like that? She might even be lying. There might have been some inexpressible reason behind it.”

“Inexpressible reason?”

“In any case, it’s likely that she is somehow related to Kanbaru.”

“Huh?”

I was shocked.

I did not think that Kanbaru-san’s name would appear here.

“As I recall, Kanbaru’s mother’s surname was Gaen. I heard this from Kanbaru during middle school — that she used to be called Gaen Suruga. Incidentally, her mother’s name is Tooe. It’s nothing conclusive until I can ask her directly, but I’d be quite taken aback if it was just a coincidence, or they were only distantly or not at all related.”

“That’s true…”

With *Suruga*, *Tooe*, and now *Izu*, it would be strange not to suspect a connection.

They were not exactly common names.

In short,

“Besides, Kanbaru said she had inherited the monkey’s paw from her mother in the first place — the way I see it, that Gaen is quite suspicious.”

“Yeah — well, I can’t say she’s not suspicious, myself.”

That was how I truly felt.

It was not only because of the way she seemed to be able to order Episode-kun around, or the way she correctly guessed various details about me without reserve.

— There’s nothing I don’t know.

It was that.

That phrase — pierced my heart.

Like a thorn.

Like a stake.

“Speaking of which, doesn’t ‘Gaen’ also mean ‘fireman’? Would it be so strange if she were the culprit behind the fire at your house, and at the tutorial

center? In an ironic way.”

“Um, probably not.”

In an ironic way?

That wasn’t a good line of thought.

“Oh, by the way, Senjougahara-san, did you try to get in touch with Kanbaru-san?”

Senjougahara-san did not known about the tutorial school burning down until I told her just a bit earlier, but she must be worried about the well-being of her precious underclassman. Seeing as she had had plenty of time to spare due to her “influenza”, there was no doubt that she had already tried to call her.

“I did.”

As expected, Senjougahara-san nodded.

That’s the initiative of the Senjougahara-san I knew.

“But it didn’t go through — I was transferred to a messaging service, so it was probably because her phone was off, or somewhere that couldn’t be reached. Of course, there’s been no word from their end, either — they really are the kind of children that grow up to become university students who never come home, not even over the New Year.”

“That’s in the very near future.”

Somehow, it even felt like it would likely be a future filled with livelihood for those two.

I wonder if they can actually leave their homes, though?

Araragi-kun, in particular.

I got the feeling that his sisters would not let him go. If he ever told them he was going to move to a boarding house, I got the feeling he would be confined in a manner much like *Misery*.

“Well, if Araragi-kun and Kanbaru did manage to meet, I doubt they would do anything reckless… but I wonder. Now that I come to it, the reason why Gaen-san is here in town seems highly likely to involve Kanbaru. In other words, there

is also the possibility of Araragi-kun and that vampire-half boy meeting and battling again… sigh.”

Just what is he up to, sighed Senjougahara-san.

Hmm. I couldn’t think of any words to comfort her with.

While I of course had my own views on the two of them, this was likely to be more painful from the position of Senjougahara-san.

“Well, in any case.”

Although she said this, it seemed as though she had to hold herself back, swallowing the many things she had wanted to say.

On that front, her capacity for endurance was truly as terrifying as her initiative.

I suppose that was what you would expect from a girl who had accompanied an abnormality for a period of over two years.

“I am not too fond of giving up on things, but I am good at waiting — so I will wait for their return, as a proper lady would.”

“Huh…”

“I’ll just have to take it out on them once they’re back.”

“Huh?”

Is *that* ladylike?

It would seem that even if Araragi-kun and Kanbaru-san escaped the predicament that had befallen them, another one would have risen up for them to overcome.

“Putting that aside, we have a more pressing problem. Let’s go back to the issue at hand.”

Said Senjougahara-san.

“They might be in a lot of trouble, but so are we — the Inflaming Tiger, was it? Suppose that we take the risk of trusting that Gaen-san.”

The wariness with which she emphasized the word “suppose” was likely

backed by her own experiences of having been deceiving by five swindlers before. Speaking of which, one of the men who had deceived her was Kaiki Deishuu who, like Oshino-san, would also be an underclassman to Gaen-san —

(More wordplay which I can't translate.)

"Personally, if you mention the 'Inflaming Tiger' (苛虎 kako), I just get reminded of the 'past' (過去 kako)."

"The past?"

"Yes — that seems more likely than a flaming tiger (虎 tora), does it not? And we can also link it to 'trauma' (トラウマ torauma)."

"Trauma?"

"Oh, no, I'm sorry, that was just a bad pun — "

It's not very original, said Senjougahara-san embarrassedly.

While she would normally make puns like this unabashedly, as though there was in fact nothing else she loved more, if she really did say that just now on purpose, then that was just horrible.

But I knew what she was trying to say.

The past — and the Tiger, huh.

" — Well, we can't just sit here telling jokes."

Not that anybody is laughing, said Senjougahara-san in an overly serious manner.

"Naming aside, and ignoring the question of whether it is a new species of abnormality or not, isn't it actually quite dangerous? After all, unlike my crab, or Mayoi-chan's snail, its intentions are aimed outwards rather than inwards, very similar to Kanbaru's left arm — "

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"What do you mean, what do I mean…? How could you not know?"

Said Senjougahara-san with exasperation, but the truth was I really did not.

What was she saying?

I had called her simply to ask her about her overall thoughts on the naming of the Inflaming Tiger which Gaen-san had taught me (its formation being somewhat puzzling) — seeing as Senjougahara-san became quite negative about this, I had in fact begun to calm down.

“No, not that. Both your house and the tutorial school have been met with fires one after another, no?”

‘Yes, that’s right. Well, unfortunately, there hasn’t been any proof linking what happened to those places with the Tiger yet — ”

“It doesn’t matter whether that sort of connection exists or not. It’s simply that, aside from the macroscopic, long-term commonality of being places you know well, isn’t there also another, more microscopic, short-term commonality as well?”

“Huh?”

In spite of all that she had told me — I still did not understand.

No, it was likely that I did.

But I,

was turning my eyes away.

“Well, fire started in those places right after the day I met the Tiger — ”

“No, not that.”

Said Senjougahara-san.

She might find it difficult to say — she might have wanted me to realize it myself wordlessly — but she said it clearly.

“*Aren’t the places where you have slept immediately burning up one after another?*”

“……!”

“In other words, if this continues, won’t my apartment or the Araragi house also suffer fires some time tonight?”

Although she said this in a disinterested voice, truly,

it was — more real a threat that anything else.

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 058

I was sitting on a bench at a certain park when I called Senjougahara-san — said park, by the way, was also where Araragi-kun and Mayoi-chan had first met.

Speaking of which, this had been where Araragi-kun and Senjougahara-san began as a couple as well, so to them, this was probably more memorable a place than the tutorial school.

Of course, to me, this was not a place of any memories worth mentioning, but simply a park which happened to be close to my house, and along the route of my usual strolling course, meaning that there was no significant, deeper reason as to why I had stopped here to make the call.

Thinking that I would go take a look at the remaints of the burnt-down Hanekawa house, I headed in its direction after leaving the library but, having lost my nerve when I finally began my approach, I decided to call Senjougahara-san first.

Or perhaps I did not so much lose my nerve as turn my eyes away from it, but at this point, I no longer understood fully what ‘turning my eyes away’ actually meant.

I was not confused.

Rather, I was perplexed.

In truth, Senjougahara-san pointed out something that had never crossed my mind — but, as she had said, it certainly was something I ought to have noticed even without her saying anything.

Although it took something of a leap of imagination for me to consider the Hanekawa house as ‘a place where I had slept immediately before’ (being my own house, sleeping there was simply too obvious an act and I had difficulty reaching this definition), at the very least, I ought to have thought of the ruins of the tutorial school as ‘a place I stayed at last night’.

It burnt up because I *had* stayed — while that was something I had not thought of, if the dates were off by just one day I could have been burnt to death

— that was the kind of fear I ought to have felt.

And yet this concept had never entered my mind, not in the slightest, which seemed less like I had lacked the imagination —

— and more like I was turning my eyes away.

I turned my back on reality.

That was perhaps what happened.

That was likely what happened.

Of course, be that as it might, I could not simply accept Senjougahara-san's suggestion — could not accept it on faith, as there was far too great a lack of data to support such a conclusion.

A logical conclusion cannot be derived from merely two samples.

Then again, we could hardly wait for a third or fourth.

Having ended the call with Senjougahara-san, I once again steeled myself, and headed for my burnt-down house — however, contrary to my belief, there was nothing there at all.

Once again,

there was an astounding lack of anything.

It was now devoid of any spectators, but it was not just a burnt field, looking as though it had always been so for the past fifteen years, nor was it like a crime scene, cordoned off by tapes and fences — it was, as anyone would call it, a vacant lot.

There was nothing — and nothing could be felt.

Although, at this moment, I could not entirely believe in this sensation of 'not feeling anything' — I had not simply lived on this plot of land, but in the house that was here, so I could perhaps accept about half of this sensation as truth.

Yes, certainly,

there had been nothing here at all.

"……"

Seeing as I would draw undue attention if I stood there for too long, I stayed for little longer than a minute and then removed myself hurriedly.

Aren't the places where you have slept immediately burning up one after another? — In other words, if this continues, won't my apartment or the Araragi house also suffer fires some time tonight?

Even after those burnt-down remains, I could not deny that these misgivings of Senjougahara-san felt rather forced — however, those words had made another precedent come to mind.

It was the story of Yaoya Oshichi.

After falling in love with a boy she had met during a great fire, she attempted to burn down her own home so as to meet her beloved again — although it was a terrible thought, one not to shiver in excitement but to tremble in fear for, I could not help feeling that sentiments like this were also quite typical of love.

Oshichi was born in the year of the *Hinoe Uma*, the Fire Horse, and women born of this year tending to be strong-minded became not so much an abnormal folk story as a kind of superstition, or rather, simple prejudice.

After all, such emotions could be possessed by anyone equally.

It was a horoscope that anyone might fall under.

Nevertheless — in this case, the term 'Fire Horse' had a deeper meaning.

Well, to be honest, I knew it didn't *really* mean anything.

— 'Uma'.

It meant 'horse'.

It was very embarrassing allowing the word 'trauma' to catch my imagination this way, much like Senjougahara-san and her pun, but nearly half of all folk stories were made up of wordplay in any case, much the same as how *Hinoe Uma* came from how 'a fire drives a horse mad'.

The tiger and the horse — together, 'trauma'.

Damage to the psyche.

"As far as possibilities go, it gives me a lot to think about — but I can't make

any conclusions yet.”

However, I got the feeling that I would be seeing one soon.

The problem, then, was whether I could face that conclusion — forced though those misgivings might have seemed, I could not help feeling unease after the implication that Senjougahara-san’s apartment or Araragi-kun’s home could burn down.

Yes, of course.

It was time to put a stop to all this.

To this story of fire — this story of mine.

“…Um, excuse me.”

The distance between the Hanekawa house (remains) and Araragi-kun’s home was such that I could have taken the bus, but in the end, I walked back on my own two feet without using any public transport.

Having been handed a duplicate key, I could enter without using the intercom (I was quite trusted) but I was naturally rather nervous about that. I could not conduct myself in that way even though I had been told to treat this place as my own home.

After all — ‘my own home’?

I did not even know what that was.

Worse yet,

I did not even know myself.

Besides, seeing as the places where I had slept in were going up in flames one after another, I doubt I should have even returned to Araragi-kun’s home, but having already stayed here for one night, perhaps it was already too late — making it all right to come back, the twisted logic that had taken hold within me said.

…But,

the fact that I had required a logical reason in order to return to my own lodgings, the poverty of my own heart, made me want to die a little inside.

“Welcome back, Tsubasa-san. You’re pretty late! Where’d you go off to?”

As I was taking off my shoes, Karen-chan came out from the living room to greet me. However, I felt rather troubled that I had no words to reply to her ‘welcome back’.

“Just a park around here. I was there for a bit.”

“Ooh.”

“Has there been any contact from Araragi-kun?”

“Nope, nothing. He just doesn’t know when to quit wasting his life. When he gets back I’ll kick the crap out of him. He’ll go flying.”

When she said this, Karen-chan actually made a kicking motion.

It was a needlessly splendid double kick.

It would seem that even if Araragi-kun resolved his current case and returned safely, there would be more than one or two predicaments here for him to overcome.

Well, I should not speak as though it did not concern me.

I, too — would very much like to voice my complaints to him,

which was something that I could do only if I were to resolve my own problems beforehand.

I, too,

wanted to have a predicament for him to overcome.

“Well, who cares about that brother nobody cares about, anyway? I’ve been waiting for you, Tsubasa-san. You could say I was getting sick of waiting. Or maybe I should say I was tired of waiting.”

“Both mean pretty much the same thing, actually.”

“Tsukihi-chan’s back too, so let’s play something! We’ve already got a deck of cards on the living room table.”

“Cards?”

Not console games?

That was rather unexpected.

“Oh, but I’m sorry, Karen-chan, I’ve got some things to think about by myself, in my room — ”

“Come on, forget about that.”

When I waved my hand in an attempt to reject her invitation, Karen-chan took my arm forcefully and began dragging me to the living room.

“But, I can’t just — ”

“It’s better for people not to think about anything, you know.”

“What kind of logic is that?!”

“Logic and all that, it just makes your head hurt, don’t it? So what if ‘man is a thinking reed’? Who says that we can’t be an unthinking reed?”

“That’s a very bold opinion!”

But ‘an unthinking reed’?! Wouldn’t that make you just a reed?

You’re fine with that?!

“Oh, come on, hurry. Don’t think you can resist me!”

“Wait, okay, I get it, I get it, just, just let me take my shoes off! We’ll play, we’ll play cards!”

“Yay!”

Karen-chan cheered.

How innocent she was.

There really was no time for me to enjoy card games, not when there were things I wanted to think about, or rather, things I had to think about — so perhaps I should have rejected her regardless, however forceful the invitation might have been.

However, I had not done so, because I realized the meaninglessness of thinking by myself — not, of course, that I agreed with Karen-chan’s “unthinking reed” perspective.

It would be horrible, being just a reed.

But — in much the same way, it was horrible that I was exactly the same whether I was thinking or not.

After all, no matter how much I thought about it,

how much I were to think, or whatever I might realize — when that something was inconvenient to myself, I could simply turn my eyes away, cutting it away from my heart, in the end forgetting it, and ultimately becoming unable to even recall it.

In that case, just as how Senjougahara-san had done so for me before — I could instead approach this with a clear head, waiting to seize on any hints in the midst of a conversation or dialogue.

Sensibility told me that I ought not involve middle schoolers like Karen-chan or Tsukihi-chan, but seeing as I was already inconveniencing them at this very moment, any awkward reservation now would be contrary to the effort — and most of all, if we were to discuss of fire, then in a sense, no one could be more suitable.

They were the Fire Sisters of Tsuganoki No.2.

It was right there in their names.

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 059

“‘Fire’? What does the word ‘fire’ bring up in my mind? Well, what else is there? The fiery heart burning in my chest!”

Karen-chan gave an answer to my question with just the slightest of posing. From the way she answered without any hesitation, it would seem that she had responded to this question many times before.

It was more instant a reply than I had expected.

It felt almost as though she had answered me before I even asked.

“In a word, it’s passion.”

“Hmm…”

When she mentioned playing with cards, I had assumed that it would be poker, blackjack, or parliament but, unexpectedly, Tsukihi-chan’s suggestion turned out to be for the three of us to each build a house of cards.

Using ten decks of cards between us, the one who completed the tallest tower in the least time would be ruled the winner.

It pains me to say that this game was not fun at all.

We were more or less playing with building blocks, and there was little room for creativity.

At the very least, I doubt it was a game that people would gather to play together — perhaps this was what they called the ‘generation gap’.

Although in this case, as we were supposed to be playing cards together, I could not be negligent, so I began making a triangle shape with my cards as I questioned the two under the guise of idle chatter.

“In that case, what does the word ‘flame’ make you think of?”

“Hot feelings made even hotter!”

Declared Karen-chan.

She really did not hesitate at all.

“It’s justice. In a word, it’s justice.”

“Mmmn, I see.”

I nodded vaguely.

It was nearly a complete contrast, the way I myself began hesitating.

At the very least, it was unlikely that the way I felt right now could not be interpreted as agreement.

“Is that why the two of you call yourselves the ‘Fire Sisters’?”

“Yeah!”

Said Karen-chan emphatically.

“In other words, the Fire Sisters are the sisters of justice!”

“Technically speaking, that’s totally wrong.”

Tsukihi-chan, sitting beside her, readily refuted what Karen-chan just said.

She refuted it with a smile.

What mercilessness.

“We were called the ‘Fire Sisters’ just because we both had ‘fire’ in our names. It’s so normal that it’s sad, really. We’ve been called that since we were primary schoolers. Even before we started working for justice.”

“Was that how it went?”

Karen-chan tilted her head.

Her memories did not seem to be very concrete.

Well, the story was more or less as I had expected it to be, but seeing as they did not give themselves that name, I suppose it was still one step above than the ‘Valhalla Combo’.

“For me, by the way, ‘fire’ or ‘flame’ remind me of love, I guess.”

“Love?”

That was true.

As a matter of fact, the tale of Yaoya Oshichi, though having somewhat

deviated in the course of its story, could also said to be based on love — after all, was there not the expression, “kindle the fire of love”?

……

On another note, Tsukihi-chan was building up her tower with incredible speed. She was simply incredible at fine works.

She apparently possessed a kind of concentration that would casually surpass any opponent.

I had actually begun this game of association beginning with “fire” by myself on my way back from the park — but it bore no fruit when played only by myself.

I could think of nothing besides words such as “red”, or “heat”, or “civilization”, all of which seemed to miss the mark.

Attaining no results due to the limits of a single human’s thought patterns — the problem laying in my own lack of imagination — those did not seem to be the generalized reasons why I had gained nothing.

It was likely that I had been thinking about it while intentionally avoiding the decisive terms.

My thoughts proceeded even as I avoided the hints.

That was why, rather than consider this by myself, I shifted to this method where I sought the answer while playing with Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan —

“Love — huh.”

That was, well, not a term that I had associated with “fire” in my mind — not a term that had occurred to me even as the story of Oshichi floated in my mind — but, as with “justice”, things did not seem to become immediately clear.

It still felt — as though the picture was out of focus.

“Yep!”

Tsukihi-chan gave me a cute little nod.

“You know, you might not know this, Hanekawa-san, but we Fire Sisters don’t only work for justice. We accept requests for love consultations, too.”

“Really?”

Certainly, it was the first time I had heard about this.

Araragi-kun had always emphasized their “ally of justice” aspect, so I had been under the impression that that was their mainstay, but now that I thought about it again, seeing as they were rather influential among the local middle school girls (and that was amazing, truly) perhaps this type of work was more prevailing for them.

“Yep. Even Onii-chan’s come asking us for help, you know.”

“Huh? Araragi-kun?”

I see.

So you’ve asked your own sisters about your love life before, Araragi-kun…

That’s just sad.

“Oh, right. Now that you mention it, yeah. It was back around May.”

Hearing what Tsukihi-chan said, Karen-chan attempted to recall something.

“He asked something like, ‘what does it mean to like someone’, some juvenile question like that, I think.”

“Oh… so I guess that means he’s discussed about Senjougahara-san with the two of you, huh?”

Putting aside how accurate Karen-chan’s memory was, this would probably be the case if it had been around May.

The two of them had started going out in that park just now on Mother’s Day, after all — although I assumed at first that they had begun before that.

…Hmm?

Why did this feel so unnatural?

I felt too at ease, as though my memories from that time were gone — or rather, as though I had jumped onto a possible conclusion while all other thoughts were forcibly sealed off.

Did I — just turn my eyes away from something again?

“Mmn, I wonder about that. It was a while back so I don’t remember exactly

what Onii-chan said. Not even what answers we gave him.”

Tsukihi-chan’s tone was quite smooth for saying something so dry.

However, from the way she spoke, it did not feel to me as though she had forgotten about it, but rather that she was trying to hide something.

…Actually, unlike Karen-chan, when she heard my question, a hint of suspicion appeared in Tsukihi-chan’s expression — or perhaps that was overstating it, but it did feel as though she was puzzled.

As though she were making some difficult measurement.

Although it was not exactly unbidden — certainly, if a person who had just been burnt out of her house came asking something like what the word “fire” brought up in their minds, it wouldn’t take the planner of the Fire Sisters to find it somewhat mysterious.

“Anger feels like ‘fire’ as well, but that’s like what Karen-chan was saying about justice. To Karen-chan, justice *is* anger.”

“That’s right!”

Said Karen-chan emphatically, once again.

So emphatic was she that the tower she was building collapsed (though it was still only on its second level).

It looked just like a building block tower tumbling down.

“Basically, anger is a flame, and that’s justice!”

“In any case, I guess Karen-chan and I define ‘fire’ as ‘passion’.”

“Passion…”

Hmmm.

Of course, expressions like “cold justice” or “freezing love” would be on the same level as a chance meeting on the dissecting table, so at the very least, I could understand where Tsukihi-chan was coming from moreso than Karen-chan — What was “passion” to me?

Heat… heated… hot… it’s no good.

It felt as though I would never hit the mark.

“What do you mean, ‘in any case’? Passion *equals* justice, Tsukihi-chan!”

Karen-chan turned on Tsukihi-chan’s choice of words.

Apparently, Karen-chan had the stronger admiration for justice — normally, one would think that the younger Tsukihi-chan were the more enthusiastic with their acts but, if anything, it felt as though she was simply going along with her older sister.

Well, a structure wherein the older sister held influence over the younger was quite easy to understand — although, seeing as I had no sisters, this was still quite difficult for me to understand.

“Yep, that’s right.”

Was that why she at first appeared to agree to Karen-chan, “But you know, Karen-chan. What you feel for Mizudori-kun, that’s passion but not justice, right?”

and then said this?

“Hmm, I guess. Sorry, I was wrong.”

She apologized.

She was oddly submissive like that.

I understood why Araragi-kun worried about the way she readily complied — it felt only obvious that Kaiki-san would be able to deceive her at his leisure.

Oh, but, ‘Mizudori-kun’?

“Karen-chan’s boyfriend.”

When I asked, Tsukihi-chan told me this with no attempts at secrecy.

“Mine is Rousokuzawa-kun, by the way.”

“…Huh? Wait, do both of you have boyfriends?”

This truly was the first time I had heard of this.

It was quite a shock.

“I’ve never heard about this from Araragi-kun.”

“Ah, Nii-chan just treats them like they don’t exist.”

Said Karen-chan.

I see. That was straightforward and easy to understand.

In fact, it was too easy to understand.

It was just so *like* Araragi-kun to do something like that — after all, one way or another, he always doted on his two little sisters.

This could be felt from the general tone of his remarks, and was exactly why he became so unimaginably enraged when Kaiki-san had deceived Karen-chan.

Goodness, he truly was a big brother, wasn’t he?

“What are they like, by the way?”

Said I.

Although digging further on this end would be unlikely to produce anything related to my current problem, as I was merely curious about the boyfriends of the Fire Sisters, I asked them.

However, finding out their answers,

“Like Nii-chan.”

“Someone like Onii-chan.”

made me regret it.

These siblings, were they really…?

But, well, if that was the case, perhaps it could not be helped that Araragi-kun would treat them “like they don’t exist” — otherwise, he would unmistakably be tormented by hatred for his own kind.

Just as it was for certain that Araragi-kun was negative towards the acts of the Fire Sisters due to his unmistakable hatred for his own kind or rather, I daresay, for himself.

Yes.

He fought, even as he hesitated, even as he regretted.

“It’s just not working out.”

Karen-chan shook her head troubledly.

“We want to get Nii-chan’s official approval somehow, but he just doesn’t want to meet Mizudori-kun or Rouzokuzawa-kun, ever. He’s so cheap when it comes to stuff like this.”

“That’s true. And he’s the one who put one over on us when he introduced us to Senjougahara-san. He really pulled the wool over our eyes.”

“Ahaha! That’s cute, isn’t it?”

My sincerest apologies for Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan, who seemed to be troubled in earnest, but this truly was amusing and so, forgetting the predicament that had befallen me, I laughed.

I gave a genuine laugh.

“Doesn’t that just basically mean that Araragi-kun, feeling his adorable little sisters are being taken away, is getting envious? Like they say, he’s burning up with jealousy — ”

Snap.

At my own words — I snapped to.

Burning up — *with jealousy*?

‘Burning’?

Jealousy.

Yes. I see it now.

Was that not — yet another keyword connected to “fire” that I ought to have thought of from the very beginning?

Envy — like the rising of a flame.

Despite having been a joke, just as how Araragi-kun treated those two as though they did not exist, or to reword it, how Araragi-kun turned his eyes away from reality — I was doing the same.

That, at least, was the same with me.

I turned my eyes away.

Away from reality.

To speak of what would cause such a thing, what else could it be but for one of the strongest emotions within a human being, one even counted among the seven deadly sins — the feeling of envy?

It was passion — envy, which could light a fire inside you.

That was why — we burn with envy.

Pierced so suddenly by the truth that I could not even turn my eyes away in time, my trembling hands — brought the partly-built tower crashing down into a miserable pile.

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 060

I doubt there could be anyone in our modern society who had never considered how wonderful it would be if the human brain were capable of being managed like a computer's hard disc.

In other words, being able to make memories (records) disappear, make them non-existent, when we did not want to remember them, or being able to overwrite our reality if we did not wish to face it, removing all sorts of trauma, horror, and unbidden, unpleasant memories — how wonderful a brain like that would be.

And — by some twist of fate, it would seem that I possessed such a wonderful thing.

I cut away my memories, and cut away my heart.

It would be very easy to understand if you were to consider the most recent example, which would be my talk with Episode-kun this morning on the way to school — remembering the happenings of spring break, I had, in my own way, been afraid of him even as I stood and talked, but it must have looked abnormal from the viewpoint of another.

I was having a pleasant chat with someone who had tried to kill me.

Could something be so unnatural?

My finding him surprisingly easy to converse with was not supposed to be the point. Perhaps if I were a character in a comic book or television drama — but, as a real human being, why would I do something some terribly abnormal?

Was it not clearly unnatural?

I myself was the only one who had not noticed it.

Because — I had forgotten.

Of course, I had no memories of the moment when my insides had been blown away (I had thought that this was due to the shock but apparently it was not so) — but I forgot the sense of fear I had for him then, the feeling of being afraid.

The flesh might remember.

But the heart had forgotten.

No, surely even the flesh had forgotten as well.

That was why, even after *something of that level* had happened to me, I could still live wholesomely every day — Araragi-kun might live inflamed by his regrets every day, but that was not at all the case for me.

I did not know when it began.

I did not know when I became able to imitate a computer like this.

However, based on my present condition, it must have been *before I became Hanekawa Tsubasa* — I must have become able to do it, unconsciously, before I became old enough to actually understand, as otherwise the story would become incoherent.

I did not know why I became able to do something so convenient or perhaps even skilful, why I learned this abnormality-like ability.

It was most likely that — the trigger to all of this was the very first memory I cut away from myself.

It was simple enough to imagine — even before I met the abnormality called the Hindering Cat, I was already something like an abnormality myself. I finally felt the weight of Oshino-san's words, about how I was more spectral than anybody else, and that the abnormality had been nothing more than a trigger for me.

No, perhaps even the Hindering Cat did not truly exist.

Instead, Black Hanekawa — might have always existed within me.

And perhaps,

the Inflaming Tiger had, as well.

Regardless of how much we wanted to forget — the past would always linger around the lives of human beings.

It would always haunt us.

And perhaps, that would never end.

Oshino-san might have given me the age of twenty as a reference, but I did not believe even that number could be relied upon — at the very least, as long as I continued to wish for this, as long as I remained as the way I was,

then for all eternity —

shall I continue this way.

Just as how Sherlock Holmes had not been allowed even to die, and forced to continue his efforts even after his retirement — always continuing on.

I would perhaps continue on.

I would likely continue on.

…But this was the end.

Let us end this.

There was no choice but to end it — this was the limit.

It would be ridiculous to be this way after fifteen, or even eighteen years.

It was time to stop fooling myself.

In the end, it was more ridiculous that such an absurdity had been accepted at all — even though it could only ever end in failure.

Deception would no longer work at this point.

This was not my limit — but my last stop.

Afterwards, I continued my endeavor with the Araragi sisters in building our towers (in the end, Tsukihi-chan was the only one who won. I went as far as I could, but I just could not build up my tower. So even you have things you can't do, said Tsukihi-chan) ate dinner together with Araragi-kun's parents after they returned from work, and then shut myself in Araragi-kun's room on the second floor.

Even though it was only my second day, I felt myself growing strangely accustomed to this room, though I suppose this was Araragi-kun's room, after all.

The first thing I did was abruptly throw myself onto the bed, still wearing my uniform, and bury my face in the pillow.

“Phew…”

I voiced my exhaustion.

But — I was not languishing.

If anything, I was feeling tense.

“I might not see you again — Araragi-kun.”

But nothing could be done about it.

After all, if my deduction was correct — and it was — then *the Inflaming Tiger had appeared in this city* because *Araragi-kun was absent*.

I sprawled myself on top of the bed for another five minutes or so.

This was *not* meaningless. There was a meaning.

This was a sort of animal marking — I was leaving traces of myself on Araragi-kun’s bed.

The traces I had not wanted to leave at the Hanekawa house.

I was trying to leave them here — in Araragi-kun’s room.

Surely, Araragi-kun would notice.

Even if we were never again to meet, the next time he slept on this bed he would probably remember a little about me.

I ought to be fine with that.

I ought to be satisfied. Complacent.

Even assuming that my deduction was correct, and furthermore, that everything I would do from now on went well — I still would not be able to meet Araragi-kun again.

Even if Araragi-kun returned safely and I was there to welcome him back — by then, the ‘me’ whom Araragi-kun knew would have gone.

Just as how Episode-kun had said that the me from spring break and the me right now are like two different persons — but even moreso, I would surely meet Araragi-kun as yet another ‘me’.

That was what it meant — to square away the past.

To square off against the Tiger.

“Well. I’m done here.”

In the end, I could not tell whether the scent I smelled had belonged to me or to Araragi-kun, but when the clock reached seven-thirty, I finally began to act.

“Oh, no. I have to hurry.”

I laid about for too long.

Well, seeing as the Hanekawa house burnt up during the afternoon, there was actually little to support that the Tiger would be nocturnal like the Cat — however, it was likely a good enough guess to reference.

First, I took off my uniform and put it on a hanger.

After that, I rummaged through Araragi-kun’s hanging wardrobe, found something among his casual clothes that seemed easier to move about in, and put it on.

Although I had borrowed his pajamas before, I felt a bit uneasy taking out his street clothes without asking, but considering how much Araragi-kun had always wanted to see me wearing casual clothes, I suppose this might in fact be exactly what he wanted.

Growing to feel somewhat mischevious, I started thinking that maybe I should take a picture of myself now and send it to him — despite still not knowing what condition he was in.

However, as it might bother him, I did not try to contact him — though now that I actually thought about it, perhaps this was just a polite excuse. If I truly were worried, I would immediately make up my mind to contact him, just like Senjougahara-san had — would that not be the human thing to do?

So, I *should* be bold. I should send him a picture, as encouragement. The way I was now, I could still help him that much.

I took out the phone from my uniform on the hanger — and stretched my hand out, taking a picture of myself. Being a high school girl, I had been using a cell phone for quite some time now, but this was the first time I had taken a picture of myself.

Despite failing several times, I soon got used to it, and managed to take quite a good picture, if I might say so myself.

Having attached this picture, I sent the message to Araragi-kun without any text — and turned my phone off.

The next time I turned this phone,

I would no longer be in this world.

So perhaps this was not so much mischief as it was harassment.

It was like sending a funeral portrait.

It was a kind of bullying, coming from the one known for being an honor student.

Cruel, in my own way.

But now, there was no longer any regret left in my heart.

I no longer had a heart to leave behind.

I could open my heart — and prepare myself.

Taking pen and paper from my bag, I sat down on the chair and faced Araragi-kun's desk. However, I was not revising today's lessons or preparing for tomorrow's.

Yes, I would write a message.

I would pen a letter.

I hesitated at the opening, but there was no point in standing on strange ceremonies at this point,

To Black Hanekawa-san,

and I simply began with this on line one.

…Perhaps this was not a neccessary step at all.

Perhaps I was doing something pointless.

I might not have any memories of myself being Black Hanekawa — but surely, Black Hanekawa had memories of being me.

Nevertheless, I wanted to express the feelings I had, as myself, to the ‘I’ who stood apart from me, to *her*.

I wanted to express to her — to the one who had always taken my place, to the dark, black part within me, to she who had always shouldered everything for me — my feelings of gratitude, and my last wish.

And so,

Like this:

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 061

To Black Hanekawa-san,

Nice to meet you.

Although that was a strange thing for me to say, this is Hanekawa Tsubasa.

First, please allow me to express my gratitude.

Thank you for taking all the pains in my place, during Golden Week, and before the Cultural Festival as well.

It is likely that I will be putting you through much hardship once again.

I am truly sorry for all the trouble I have caused for you.

It has truly driven home that perhaps, when I buried you after you had been ran over on the road, it was only due to my own willful ego. I doubt that the onus on me, to whom you have been bound to, is not something I can ever make up for.

And perhaps, therein lies the true meaning behind those words frequently spoken of by Oshino-san, that ‘people just get saved all by themselves’.

After all, as I had not considered whether I could truly shoulder the bond I formed with you, or this onus, as it is, it was in all regards nothing more than a makeshift solution on my part.

Just as how Araragi-kun bound Shinobu-chan to him in order to save her, I have shackled you to me as Black Hanekawa.

And yet, unlike Araragi-kun, I was not worried in the slightest and continued to live in peace without a care in the world.

How sinful I am.

Therefore, I am actually not in any position to ask something of you, but if this continues, I will end up hurting my precious friends.

The only thing I can do is rely on you.

The only one I can rely on is you.

That is why I will say this for the first time since I have been born — help.

Help me.

Please, help me.

I will not trouble you ever again, nor will I ever leave you alone again.

Please.

I beg of you.

Perhaps you have no say in the matter as you have to protect me, so my saying this changes nothing, but please, I truly must ask this of you.

It may be of use as a reference, so this time, I will write down everything I know.

Although you share my memories, it seems that this time, you are completely cut off from me (I can imagine the reason, as noted below) so it might be easier to understand if you read this information in text form.

Unlike yours, my own memory is full of gaps, so I cannot say anything with certainty, but this is probably the truth.

I don’t know everything, just the things I know.

Those are the words I use against Araragi-kun, like an excuse, but please allow me to say it to you as well.

I will give you everything I know.

Now, this is something that does not need to be said, something that you as an abnormality would already know without saying, but that gigantic tiger, the Inflaming Tiger, is like you, a new type of abnormality born from my heart.

More precisely, it is an abnormality newly cut off from my heart.

I can say this with certainty.

The major difference is that while you were based on an old abnormality, the Hindering Cat, no such *foundation*, no such vessel exists as a base for the Inflaming Tiger.

If anything, the base was you.

As you are a Cat, so it is a Tiger.

Something more primordially untamed.

Following the Cat, I imagined a Tiger, a creature more primordial, a beast more fierce.

The next in line, you could say.

I should have noticed it sooner, but during these few months I have gotten too used to abnormalities, including you.

He who has suffered the aberrant is drawn to it.

Those were the words of Oshino-san.

Just as how Araragi-kun has been getting accustomed with utilizing his own immortality ever since spring break, I have gotten used to treating my own heart as an abnormality and cutting it away ever since Golden Week.

Much like how I got used to wearing contacts — you can get used to anything.

And the result of my proficiency,

was the Inflaming Tiger.

I believe the reason for the various disparities between the you during Golden Week, the you before the Cultural Festival, and the you this time, are not so much individual differences but rather an expression of my proficiency.

It was simply too opportunistic for an abnormality that Black Hanekawa would appear only during my sleep, release all my stress at this time, and return to me before my waking up or needing to be dealt with by Oshino-san or Araragi-kun and Shinobu-chan, and too convenient on my part.

But it was a matter of course.

You are, after all, an abnormality born from me, for my sake.

Of course it was convenient.

Perhaps this was something you have already noticed or rather something I had been mistaken about since the beginning, but in the first place, I called you out this time, obstinately, not simply to release the stress of the house burning down.

Kanbaru-san had “thought you’d be feeling down, but it doesn’t look like that’s true”, and that is thanks to you, of course — but that is simply an incidental effect.

It is unrelated with the fire itself — the source of the fire is *also* the source.

This is something I was not conscious of at the time, or rather something I had no memories of, so unfortunately I can only recount it as the third party, but it is likely that I relied on you as my safeguard against the Inflaming Tiger.

Just as how I had always relied on you in the past, before I was ever hindered by the Hindering Cat.

I depended on you yet again.

The condition known as a ‘split personality’ by the public and ‘dissociative identity disorder’ by experts is challenged in modern healthcare, and I am not someone who can affirm it, but even if it may not be the correct way to express this, I doubt there is an simpler interpretation of the kind of person I am.

Some time ago,

“You scare me, you know.”

Araragi-kun said that to me.

And,

“The way Class Rep act like a saint, it’s disgusting.”

Oshino-san said that to me.

To be honest, I had no idea what they were talking about then.

I am always simply myself, in my most natural state.

If you were to ask Araragi-kun, he would say that I was trying too hard for a normal girl, that I was excessively logical, and though that deduction was quite close to the truth, it still could not provide an answer as to why I had become able to do something so inordinate.

It was not something one could do simply by wishing for it.

And yet, why it is that I can manage this?

The reason is simple.

It is because I have been turning my eyes away from inconvenient truths and cutting my heart away from myself ever since my youth.

The day before yesterday, Senjougahara-san had said that I was ‘dim to the darkness’, which was absolutely true, but more than that, I was ‘blind’ to it.

I turned my back on malice and misfortune.

That is not self-protection, but self-sacrifice, I think — by cutting away the inconvenient ‘me’, I was preserving myself.

Just as how I could not see my own house from the classroom window that day,

as soon as I see something disagreeable, I cut it away as an object unrelated to myself. Even when I suffer through pains, I cut it away as something unrelated to myself.

As such, my personality would never become twisted.

I would be free from worry.

I would not even wise up to my mistakes.

However, that twistedness is something required for survival by every human being, and I made all of it disappear from my sight.

Of course people would be scared, or feel disgusted.

Araragi-kun had argued that this was all too much to call a miracle — because my way of being is not a miracle, but something much worse, the result of a bloody struggle.

It seems that, when counselling a child who is not loved by her parents, or in other words, who has been abused during her upbringing, the most difficult task is first having that child admit that she has been abused.

To admit the fact that she is being tyrannized.

To accept that you are not loved by your parents is no easy matter.

In most cases, the child will treat the truth of her abuse as ‘not having happened’. Perhaps by distorting the facts into some sort of explanation, or by

simply treating the truth itself as not having occurred; there are many variations to the condition, but the point they all share is that they turn their backs on reality.

Yes, I shall admit to it now.

I was abused by my parents as I grew up.

I was abused in each, every and all ways by my parents.

Not once was I ever loved.

Not for a moment was I ever loved.

But I was never conscious of this.

I ignored my own pain, thinking that it happened in all families, to some greater or lesser degree. Even when I was struck on the face, I did not think that it was abuse. I did not think so. Just like that, I cut away this stress as the Cat, and treated it as though it never happened.

In the first place, if you were to ask me to define the meaning of ‘abuse’, it would be extremely easy and, at the same time, extremely difficult.

The act of ‘abuse’ can be established even without violence. Taken to the extreme — though this was in fact quite a common view — ‘spoiling’ is also a form of abuse.

The abuse known as education. The abuse known as discipline.

The abuse known as nursing. The abuse known as filiation.

Perhaps even the opinion that anything a parent does to a child is decidedly abusive is ultimately feasible and, depending on the argument, not something to be completely denied, and but rather deserving to be heard. After all, we do not accept such logic as abuse not actually counting as such when approved of by the victim — it is an ambiguous argument, but we simply cannot pass judgement without a comprehensive picture.

That was the reason why I could continue to assert it.

I could keep on turning my eyes away, asserting that I was not being abused.

I was not being tyrannized at all.

I was not being neglected at all.

I could not recall anything like that ever occuring.

They had done the minimum, as parents —

It is worse than sophistry.

They had *only* done the minimum.

The absolute lowest, that was all they have ever done.

That was how I should have thought of it.

I have been abused in the worst way, by ‘not being loved’ — and of course, they had their excuses.

However, these excuses have nothing to do with the child at all.

Parents loving their child is not an obligation to be fulfilled, but an emotion, and if it cannot be done these two adults ought not to have gotten married or bore children.

If you were able to exist without the feeling of pain and maintain a disconnection to sorrow, then you would be able to remain free of stress, constantly able to exhibit your highest performance whether it be in study, or sports, or logics, or morals.

If one could exist without feeling the pressure of failure, the anxiety of possible further suffering, and the pains of both body and mind, then one would be a perfected human being in all regards.

That is the truth of the honor student, Hanekawa Tsubasa.

The worthless answer to the question of why I am the way I am.

I can ignore the tedium.

I can be this unfair because I can leave to others the darkness and pain that is borne by all humans.

Senjougahara-san would be enraged if she heard about this.

To think that she had suffered for two years — her struggle over two years which existed only to bring her pain, and I, without suffering, without feeling

pain, without a struggle, was able to put it all onto your shoulders.

‘Frustration’ would fail to describe it.

That I would create the form of Black Hanekawa after becoming involved with the Hindering Cat is of incredible interest, but as noted above, the abnormality was nothing more than a trigger for me.

You are none other than yourself.

Besides, this ‘third’ you is much more deeply cut off from me compared to the last two instances. The reason, as noted above, is because I ‘got good at it’.

When asking her what the secret to building a card tower was, Tsukihi-chan told me, “really, it’s just a matter of getting used to it. There’s no technique, I just keep trying over and over again. Even you’d be able to do it, Hanekawa-san, once you’ve tried it twenty times.” which is a universal truth, and that is why I could cut you away from my heart more cleanly than the first time or the second.

You have been established as an individual.

You might as well call it a mental breakdown. Terrible news.

Actually, it is far worse than that.

After all, you were not the only independent abnormality I cut off from my heart this time.

Perhaps I should say that there is another amongst us.

Perhaps I should say that there is another in the clowder.

I cut away the Tiger first before I did so to you.

If you are the incarnation of my stress — then the Inflaming Tiger is the incarnation of my envy.

Just as how I would never have reached the idea of ‘a new type of abnormality’ had I not spoken with the library worker, I would never have reached this keyword had it not been for the talk with Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan, though now that I have realized what it is I am absolutely convinced it could be nothing else, so familiar is the word to me.

Envy.

Although to be honest, the word ‘envy’ truly was foreign to me until the day before yesterday.

It did not even need cutting away.

I have never been jealous of anybody.

After all, I am someone who can take on any task without any stress, with all my vigor, a sickeningly perfect honor student.

I have never held a grudge against another.

If anything, the feelings I had were closer to dissatisfaction; ‘Why can’t everyone work harder? If only they would make more of an effort.’

This is a feeling that Araragi-kun once scolded me for, something which, now that I thought about it, was very egoistic of me. Unlike me, everybody struggles against stress in their daily lives, and it is exactly because of the way I cheat that I have never been told this before.

‘If you work hard, you can do anything.’

I turned my eyes away even from the feelings of Araragi-kun, who had told me off, someone who achieved all that she had precisely because she never worked hard or made an effort.

That is why the word ‘envy’ is foreign to me.

Well, I cannot say that I have never experienced it, but it is for certain that the accumulated amount of envy I have felt so far in my life is well below the average.

The total amount of envy that was cut away from my heart is known to me.

However, it was three days ago that this amount of envy leapt over its threshold.

I remember now.

It was on the day of the new trimester.

Being woken up by the vacuum cleaner as usual, washing my face, dressing myself, and heading to the dining room for breakfast, I found the one whom I

should call my father and the one whom I should call my mother already eating.

I accepted the sight of this as though nothing were wrong, and began making my breakfast. But, just because I cut it away from my memory immediately, just because the memory was overwritten, does not mean that I did not witness it clearly.

The two of them were having the same dishes.

Although we all resided in the same house, we all lived separately, so how was it that one of the two clearly cooked a meal for both, and they ate it together?

Now that I thought about it — yes, of course.

That morning, I *had to choose* my cookware when making breakfast — that should not have been the case.

After all, I must have been the last one to enter the kitchen, so there should have been no need for me to choose — the other two sets should have already been used.

In other words,

this could only mean that one of them had cooked for the sake of the other — it could only be that they were eating breakfast together.

I became the outcast.

And I felt my own jealousy clearly.

…It probably sounds ridiculous that I should even bother to care about whether or not these abusive parents of mine, who reside in the same house as me but cannot even be called family, have breakfast together.

But there is no logic to this.

That illogicality is the explanation for why I felt such incredible rejection that I would burn down the Hanekawa house and force them to stay at a hotel.

I did not want to be left standing alone in that small room.

I did not mind being ‘three persons’,

but I did not want it to be ‘two people’ and ‘one person’.

Not that I ever thought of becoming ‘three’ — I simply did not want to become ‘two’ and ‘one’.

I did not want to see that, even if I had to sleep in the open.

I wanted to turn my eyes away.

Those feelings of charity I had, that this could be a good chance for them to make small steps towards each other again, were in fact nothing but the complete reverse.

They were not simply twisted.

They were completely, utterly twisted.

They were terrifying, disgusting — and foolish.

That I would not realize my own feelings, cut away what I *had* realized, and conversely wish for the two of them to reunite — my heart was already not that of a human being.

It should be that of an abnormality, instead.

One’s ‘true voice’, rather than one’s public face, is true because we avert our eyes inwards.

Of course, I was the reason that their relationship became strained, and said reason would be leaving Japan in half a year, so perhaps it would not be strange for changes to occur in the relationship between the two who had been husband and wife in the first place. Or perhaps the trigger, not the abnormality, was set off during Golden Week when they were hospitalized together.

But, in that case, it made no sense to become jealous of the two even though it would require a further reason on my part.

That is why there is no logic in this.

Even though I say that they might as well just separate,

even though I want the extinguished love to be relit,

I did not want to see the two of them getting along,

and no matter what, I was jealous of their reconciliation.

I was jealous, from the bottom of my heart, of their attempt to rebuild their family after such a long time.

I was burning with jealousy.

That was all it took for my envy to cross its threshold, and for the Inflaming Tiger to be born.

Just as how I gave birth to you during Golden Week, I gave birth to the Tiger in the new trimester.

I was able to create a new, original abnormality without requiring a base like the Hindering Cat, which once again proves that you can get good at anything, as long as you repeat it enough times.

As it were, that was where the phrase, ‘no fiercer a tiger than the inflaming of tyranny’ came in, but as Senjougahara-san said, it also felt to me that Gaen-san had led me to this, somewhat.

Additionally, I believe that if I had not met Mayoi-chan that day on the way to school, the Tiger would not have been born.

It is due to my conversation with Mayoi-chan on the way to school that *I found out Araragi-kun was currently away*, meaning that *I knew that he would not be here to deal with the Tiger*, unlike your two previous appearances, which was why the it was born.

Araragi-kun acts as something like the brakes to my heart. I had been looking forward to meeting Araragi-kun in the classroom for the new trimester that day, more than I had expected myself to.

It was all simply poor timing.

This was unmistakably the reason for the appearance of the Tiger immediately after parting ways with Mayoi-chan.

In the end, the fault was mine.

The Inflaming Tiger is a spectral transformation born from the brittleness of my own heart.

The flame of jealousy which consumes all.

The reason for the burning of the Hanekawa house was of course jealousy towards my parents, and the reason for the burning of the tutorial school was similarly jealousy.

The jealousy that I felt for Kanbaru-san, for being the only one Araragi-kun had asked for help.

At that time, I was angry at Araragi-kun — or at least, I thought I was, but in truth, I was likely greatly jealous of Kanbaru-san, just as Senjougahara-san was.

That must have been the case.

The envy I discovered for the first time — was an emotion all too fitting for me.

However, this emotion was soon cut away from me and removed to the Tiger. My jealousy already had the perfect outlet of escape prepared beforehand.

Regarding the Tiger, I had expressed earlier that it was an independent abnormality like you, but perhaps it should be described as an autonomous abnormality instead.

Unlike you, who is bound to my body, the Tiger is free to move and act.

As a result,

that memorable tutorial school has been reduced to cinders.

Senjougahara-san's conjecture, that the buildings I have slept in immediately burn down, was ultimately off the mark, but considering the special trait of the Inflaming Tiger, things might have been much better off if that had been true.

In short, the things I feel jealous for become targets for the Tiger to burn, one after another.

It would be par for the course for Senjougahara-san's flat or the Araragi house to be burnt down completely at some point. Not because I had slept there, but because I was jealous.

The memory may already be lost to me, but having curiously opportunely been able to observe from the inside the Senjougahara home, with its resolute bond of father and daughter, and the Araragi house, built by a family backed by mutual trust, it would be impossible for one such as myself, having known neither family nor home, to not become jealous.

The way I turned my back on this jealousy, pushed it onto the Tiger, and then held such carefree thoughts as, ‘it makes me feel happy to be treated as one of the family’, made me want to put a curse on myself, but the curse I held was aimed at others.

At this point, the only consolation is that, much like you during Golden Week, the Tiger’s targets for conflagration are limited to buildings and it does not seem to be an abnormality that targets people. It seems that the value of not harming others is one that is clearly established within myself.

Most likely, this is because I knew just how much Araragi-kun had suffered during spring break, torn between the life of one and the rescue of another’s.

No, that was not it.

That was just embellishment.

During Golden Week, I more-or-less did not look to others, to victims, or to my parents at all, but simply turned my back on them and rushed to release my own stress, so their lives were of secondary concern to me (and in fact, I ended up nearly killing Araragi-kun) and I was acting only for myself.

This time is no different.

What I truly envied, felt truly jealous for, was not other people but places.

Places fit to reside in.

That is why my targets have been not so much buildings as they have been houses.

Places where people lived with one another.

It is precisely because I slept in the hallway and had no room for myself that the Hanekawa house, the tutorial school, that these places burnt down.

That is the Tiger I have given birth to.

Wanting to have some place to belong to, I became jealous of those who always possessed one as though it were only natural.

That is why it burnt homes rather than people.

It accepted all my destructive impulses which told me that houses like that

should just disappear, and my envy beyond envies — that was how much I had been set ablaze.

That was how fiery my passion became.

Yes, it was irresponsible of me to say that, ‘like others’, I had destructive impulses and thoughts such as, ‘a house like that should just disappear’.

What does it even mean to be ‘like others’?

Just how painful was it to be ‘like others’?

I never even bothered to find out.

I thought that these washed-out destructive impulses, left over from all the cutting away and taking away, were emotions — I was under the impression that I was normal.

I was too protective of myself,

almost as though I was abusing myself.

Yes.

More so than anyone else,

I abused, and killed, myself.

Most of this self-analysis is likely correct, but all the commonalities with Golden Week so far does not mean that there is no concern of someone possibly being hurt.

It just so happened that there were no people inside the Hanekawa house or the tutorial school, and if there had been, they would have been burnt as well.

If, for example, Araragi-kun or Kanbaru-san had been in the building when the Tiger was set in motion.

I shudder at the possibility.

And it is hardly impossible for the same possibility to soon become truth with Senjougahara-san’s flat and Araragi-kun’s home.

The relationship Senjougahara-san had with her father.

The relationship the Araragi sisters had with Araragi-kun.

I could not possibly say that I had never once envied them.

It must have actually been a lie to say that I have never known envy. I felt envy for every single person I was jealous of.

I wanted a father like that.

I wanted to be woken up by sisters like that every morning.

These feelings — became a flame.

…Perhaps it was absolutely correct that I have never 'stayed over' at a friend's house before. Or rather, perhaps I have always subconsciously avoided it.

No, that was not it.

If the Tiger 'got better' at this — if it repeatedly performed its conflagration and became proficient at it, then no home in the world would escape its flames, regardless of whether I slept there or not.

Not even the school.

Not even the library.

Not even the park.

Nothing would be left unburnt.

That,

was how much I envied a warm home.

So much so that I wanted to extinguish its warmth with a blaze.

…To be honest, I do not know what values you, as in the abnormality Black Hanekawa, hold.

Although you share my memories and knowledge, and face things that I have turned my back to, you and I are nearly completely different (there would be no point in having a split personality if that were not the case).

As such, it is unclear to me what thoughts you hold regarding this conjecture, regarding the phenomenon of the Inflaming Tiger.

Perhaps you do not see any particular problems with going along with this line of thought. At the very least, that probably is how it would seem from an

abnormality's perspective.

Perhaps you will tell me something like, although arson is a great crime, this type of case is not punishable by law and, as such, I need not worry.

It is just one viewpoint amongst many.

Certainly, I would wish to accept those kind words.

But it is time for me to end that, as well.

What would be a greater nightmare than to be able to sunder my heart at the slightest provocation, endlessly giving birth to successive abnormalities, leaving all responsibilities to others, and letting them meet horrible fates even as I continue to live on, comfortable and carefree, without realizing a single thing?

Just how many human beings have I mangled, how much suffering have I spread since Golden Week, without even knowing it?

It was as though I felt no pain even when my cheeks were being pulled.

Does that not resemble the life I have led?

It isn't as though I wish to be an exemplar, or a good person. No matter what morals or logics I possess, it is all meaningless if I myself am standing on the backs of others.

I do not wish to live,

while standing on the backs of you, or the Tiger.

Even if this incident with the Tiger were to be resolved, might I not simply give birth to a lion or a leopard next, continuing on and on?

But even if you all were to say to me that you did not mind, for that was what you were all born to do, my heart has already been set.

This heart of mine, sundered so many times that not even its core remains, has been set.

An end must be put to it all.

No, it must all finally begin.

I will turn my eyes forward,

and face not only the Tiger, but you as well.

I will open these shut eyes.

The Sleeping Beauty who has been unconscious for eighteen years must now wake up.

So, please, Black Hanekawa-san.

Come back to me.

Please, come back to my heart.

Come back, together with the Tiger.

I beg of you.

My heart is your home.

I will never leave you by yourself, so please do not leave me by myself.

If Oshino-san is correct, when I reach twenty — or perhaps even before then, you and the Tiger may disappear.

Perhaps, once the girl becomes of age, these adolescent fantasies will ceast to exist and disappear.

Even now, you are likely nothing more than an echo.

In time,

you will likely disappear.

That should be the way things are.

But, please don't.

Please don't disappear. Please don't go away.

Please, come back.

Let's stop living apart like this.

My heart may be small, but we can live there together, horns locked, as a family would.

I won't tell you to just go to sleep again.

I swear to you now that I will love you in your entirety: the stress, the envy, the

anxiety, the pain, the worst possibilities and the darkest darkness.

It may be a brazen wish,

but brazen shall I be.

…Araragi-kun will probably be disappointed.

After all, the merit that he sees within me, or as Senjougahara-san called it, my ‘white as innocence’ purity, is simply the void left behind by the untamed part of me.

That one point, at least, I will not attempt to hide.

I don’t want him to feel dejected.

In the end, I have never once told him that I love him.

I simply fell in love, and became lovelorn, all by myself.

To be honest, it has always felt strange to me, the way I became so fascinated by him even though I had never spoken to him before spring break, and how, even now, I am still deeply, stubbornly in love with him, but I finally understand it now.

He was such a radiant figure to me, because I knew of no one else who would face his own weaknesses so directly.

He was so dazzling, I would be blinded if I looked straight at him.

I still remember fondly that night when I bad-mouthed Araragi-kun together with Senjougahara-san — although I had thought that she would be the same as me, the insults Senjougahara-san had for Araragi-kun were, in fact, all praising him.

That he was too soft, for example.

Everything she said had been along those lines.

The anger she had for him was in fact the most honest of affections.

The feelings I have for him are the only things I have not cut away.

Even when I became you, I still deeply loved Araragi-kun.

…As he tells me, he saved the dying Shinobu-chan even as he cried in fear of

death.

If it had been me, I probably would have saved her with a smile.

Yes, that was it. If there was one moment when I truly fell in love with him, it would be when I saw him fight Shinobu-chan to the death, even as he cried.

Because I have never cried before.

And so, I fell in love with the crybaby Araragi-kun.

Episode-kun said that I had become normal, but if I ever lost any more of myself,

if I ever ended up becoming ‘me’, Araragi-kun would likely cry again.

I truly did not wish for that.

But I will no longer turn my eyes away from things I do not wish for.

I wish to become one with both of you, even as I face the reality that it would disappoint Araragi-kun.

And,

this is so that I can continue to love him, as well.

Black Hanekawa-san.

Now that I think about it, that name is too cold.

‘Me’.

Are you the other me within myself?

That feels off the mark, as well.

I am sure that, to me, you are something like a little sister. I thought so when I saw Karen-chan and Tsukihi-chan.

I am a bad older sister. I am sorry.

I am sorry for making you worry all this time.

This is truly my last wish.

This is the last time I will force you to take the most painful role.

Please, save our other little sister.

She has run away from home, lost in her mesmerizing game of fire, and I really don't know how to approach her at all, but I will wait for her return, no matter how long it takes.

I will love you both, and love myself.

Sincerely yours,

PS: Please excuse my brevity.

…Well.

I finished reading the letter Mistress wrote just before she went to bed nyah.

You have got to be kidding me nyah.

I'd always thought that Mistress was a clever one, unlike idiots like me nyah — but it looks like she might be just as stupid, if not stupider than me nyah.

I'd thought that she wrote this letter because she's just smarter while I'm stupid, but I'm starting to doubt even that.

Even if she hadn't left behind some letter to ask for help from a stray like me, I've got no choice, character establishment-wise nyah, but to do as she wishes anyway in order to support her intentions — if she'd just gone to sleep as usual, I would've gone out tonight to beat the crap out of that tiger anyway nyah.

Seeing as I share memories with Mistress, I would've realized the true nature of that tiger — of the Inflaming Tiger just as she did, without losing anything in the process anyway nyah.

No, Mistress already understood all that nyah — that's what she wrote nyah.

Does that mean this was something she had to ask for herself despite all of the above nyah?

I guess you could call it being conscientious, but in the end, Mistress will never realize that it's this sort of thing that makes her beyond ordinary nyah.

That's the biggest tragedy of all nyah.

"Nyah,"

I left the note on the desk.

I actually have the memory of when Mistress was writing this letter, so there is in fact no reason for me to even read it nyah. So maybe I'm not one to talk about Mistress when I'm the one taking my time reading the whole thing nyah.

In any case, I've already got a grasp of the current situation nyah.

The Inflaming Tiger.

And the seat of the disease born by Mistress.

Everything's been detailed nyah.

That said, it looks like Mistress has still got a few misunderstandings nyah — though I suppose, seeing as she was conjecturing with a lack of data to base her decisions on, these mistakes couldn't have been avoided nyah.

Plus, both the style and context of the letter are all over the place by Mistress' standards — it definitely wasn't something written while she was calm nyah.

It isn't a situation to be hoping for full marks anyway, so getting an 80 for an A-grade is good enough nyah.

"But I just don't get this. Nyah, I mean, it's like I kind of do. But it feels like the question of why Mistress, who felt so jealous for homes and houses that she starting burning up, wouldn't feel envious about Senjougahara Hitagi and Araragi Koyomi going out, just sort of sticks out nyah."

The strongest emotion in Mistress is love nyah.

It doesn't even need explaining, if you just think back to the transformation before the Cultural Festival nyah.

Basically, the bastard's younger little sister was correct in first linking 'fire' to 'love'.

But in that case, the truth would be that the first thing Mistress ought to have burnt shouldn't have been the Hanekawa house or the tutorial school, but none other than *Senjougahara Hitagi herself* nyah —

Did Mistress not think of that nyah?

That can't be it nyah.

Was this what she meant by turning her eyes away nyah?

But if Mistress is really not turning her eyes away from the truth anyway, but staring right back at it, then she'll come to that reason eventually nyah.

Though I wonder if she can bear it nyah.

Bear that harsh reality — when she can no longer cut away her own heart.

"Love us both — and love yourself. I don't think she understands just how difficult that will be nyah. Mistress may be an extreme case, but everyone turns their eyes away from stress or envy to some degree nyah."

There's no such thing as a human being who can look straight at the world without turning away nyah. Why does Mistress have to be chained to these shackles all by herself nyah?

Why does she have to be chained to me and the Tiger?

Cutting everything away from yourself,

doesn't mean it doesn't still hurt nyah.

In fact, can you imagine the pain of cutting at your own heart?

"The biggest misconception of all is calling something like me 'family' — nyahaha, I'm just the house cat, y'know."

No, I'm just a stray.

Besides, I was male when I was run over, so it's weird to call me a little sister — and in the first place, even though my base was the Hindering Cat, seeing as I was created by raw material cut off from Mistress, my gender isn't just vague, it's undeniably a grey area between being a sister and being a brother nyah.

What's the point of asking an abnormality about its gender, anyway?

And calling that gigantic tiger a 'little sister', that's really something nyah. You do realize female beasts tend to be the fiercer ones, right?

It would have been fine if she just asked me to take it down or exterminate it, but it's ridiculous asking me to drag it back to her heart nyah. So, it's not even a 'Dead or Alive', just plain 'Captured Alive', right?

That's crazy nyah.

I was planning on beating the crap out of it anyway. But now she's asking for

even more nyah.

It's kind of like what that Aloha specialist said: "Don't think with violence. Abnormalities and humans have to coexist." That human bastard said stuff along those lines too nyah.

Even though we are both new types of abnormalities born from the same Mistress, unlike me, it has no abnormality as a base — it has no vessel nyah. In the end, Mistress just doesn't understand what that means, seeing as she's not an abnormality herself nyah.

She doesn't understand just how free it is, to be an abnormality described in no text, found in no record, and unmentioned by the mouth of any human nyah.

Frankly, I don't even want to imagine nyah.

Simply put — that Tiger has no blind spots, no weak points.

It would be tough just facing off against it, not to mention bringing it back nyah.

I will have to face it directly,

and crush its strengths nyah.

"Haaah."

I sighed.

Things feel really heavy on my shoulders nyah.

They weigh like a ton of bricks on me nyah.

"Really, it doesn't matter to me. I'm an abnormality who works only for Mistress, so to be honest, even if her parents' house gets burnt, or some memorable place gets burnt, or a friend's place gets burnt, or *this* house gets burnt, I really don't care. I mena, I'd probably get a kick out of watching the flames go up."

Fundamentally, there isn't much difference between the Tiger, the incarnation of envy, and me, the incarnation of stress nyah.

It even said to me that we are the same kind of abnormality nyah — so if anything, I understand how the Tiger feels.

The other difference between us is that it's independent from Mistress, whereas I'm stuck nyah.

In truth, I doubt there is any meaning to this.

As Mistress knows well, an abnormality like me will go away someday, no matter what — I'm just an echo that will disappear in time nyah.

Maybe the Tiger is like that too.

Maybe if you leave it alone, she would be able to cut off all the flames of her emotions, and they will all extinguish without a trace — so maybe there is no need for Mistress to burden herself with all this nyah.

This isn't just something unnecessary.

This might even bring about the opposite effect nyah.

It's definitely a load on her for me to come out like this, after all — it's not something to be accepted, but something to be erased.

It ought to be terminated nyah.

It's not difficult at all, and in fact very simple. As long as Mistress wishes for it, I will disappear nyah.

But that was not the choice Mistress made nyah.

She's trying to take us back in, after cutting us away.

Strange, isn't it?

I mean, me and the Tiger,

we're just a nuisance to Mistress.

That's why she shouldn't just stubbornly accept it — if Mistress really is clever, she'd be able to do it —

"That's why — there's no meaning to this nyah."

Senjougahara Hitagi has changed.

That human bastard's changed too, I suppose.

And Mistress has changed as well.

But just because you changed yourself doesn't mean you change anything about the world nyah.

Just because she's changed doesn't mean she can make the past go away. Just because he's changed doesn't mean he can make the past go away.

It cannot be changed, cannot be replaced, cannot be faked.

A man is himself for life nyah.

Mistress might have created us during spring break, when she was wandering the town hoping to meet a vampire, but it didn't change anything — which is why, the best thing to do is to just let us disappear nyah.

That bastard, and the Aloha, that has to be what they want too.

I'm a burden and a nuisance,

and so is the Tiger.

"But, nyah. I did get asked nyah."

I wonder what this feeling is nyah?

Whether I'm asked to or not makes no difference in what I am about to do — so why do I feel so eager?

The load on my shoulder should be just weighing me down.

So why does it feel so comfortable?

Why does it make me feel like I can do anything, just knowing that I am no longer aimless — that I have a place, a home to return to?

It's like I'm actually happy nyah.

It's like I'm about to cry nyah.

"Still, you won't see any tears from me — I'm a cat. You won't see any tears, but you'll definitely hear me cry nyah."

Mee-ow.

I purred — and opened the lock to the window.

My coming and going got found out by Mistress because I'd forgotten to lock this window last night (though seeing as there was a lot of other evidence, I

guess she would have found out anyway) but I won't be coming back to this room again as myself anyway, so there's no need to care about this now nyah.

Apparently, Mistress picked the clothes I am wearing now because they are easy to move in, but to me, it's easiest to move while I am totally naked nyah. But that wouldn't be good for Mistress (and I feel bad about going out wearing only her underwear during Golden Week) so I am just going to accept this favor of hers nyah.

But I'm still not wearing anything on my feet, thank you.

Just as I put my feet onto the sash of the window though, I thought of something nyah.

I suppose this is what people call a 'whim' nyah.

Just like how Mistress will no longer be herself, I will no longer be myself no matter how this ends nyah.

I'm not just talking about the individual differences between the Black Hanekawas — after this, I won't ever come out again.

After all the postponing in May and June, the abnormality that I am will finally be resolved nyah.

In that case, I'll leave behind a few lines too.

Though I guess, in my case, it's more like a will nyah.

Nyah, never mind.

I'm not going to die or disappear. I'm just going to go back home.

Even though I'm pretty late nyah.

"So, time to serve Mistress one last time nyah."

I don't plan on writing anything long nyah.

After quickly scribbling one more line after Mistress' handwriting with a pencil, I finally leapt out of the completely open window and into the moonlit night.

"I'm off."

Like this:

Like Loading...

Nekomonogatari (White) : 062

I am a tiger. My name is the Inflaming Tiger.

Although I have some notion of where I was born, the only memory I have is of weeping in that dim, sodden place — I am made up of not only envy, but all dark emotions.

I am a product of the darkness.

A darkness that one would wish to turn one's eyes away from.

However, what I am or what my name is, where I was born or what I am made up of, it all makes no difference.

The name of the 'Inflaming Tiger' instead only troubles me. A tiger dies and leaves its skin, a man dies and leaves his name, or so they say, but being made only of dimness and darkness, and existing as though I was dead to begin with, I plan on leaving behind neither.

I plan on leaving behind not even the trace of ash.

Not a single pillar will be spared by the flames.

Everything will be burnt.

The only thing important to me is this searing sense of obligation that burns up within me.

The Inflaming Tiger pays no heed to the past.

It must be burnt. It must be burnt.

What must be burnt?

Everything must be burnt.

The moment after I came into this world, I saw the mother who had given birth to me.

Or perhaps she should be called my older twin sister.

It would seem the flame residing in my heart comes from her — my strong,

firm, fearful, and fragile sister, the one of pure white.

Pure, clean white. Bright white and brazen lies.

My beautiful sister, quite unlike myself.

She truly was beautiful.

To think that I can support such beauty, such purity — it fills me with pride.

But it makes no difference.

It makes no difference as to how the fire is lit.

It makes no difference as to how the blaze burns.

The only thing within me is a sense of obligation.

If I possess no sense of ‘acting on her behalf’, then what I do will not harm her, unlike what the cat also born of her had said.

I have no establishing characteristics.

You could say I am merely a flame.

A white flame is what I am.

I have been given neither consciousness nor will. It may appear that I am thinking and speaking right now, but it is simply an act, nothing more than a pretense.

I am a natural phenomenon.

I simply burn that which ought to be burnt.

No.

There is nothing in this world which does not burn.

Everything must be burnt.

I feel an envy for everything and anything within myself.

For fathers. For mothers. For friends. For underclassmen.

They should simply disappear.

They should simply leave.

They should suffer. Grieve. Fall into depression.

They should mourn. Sink into the depths. Be overwhelmed.

They should cry.

Cry, as I have cried.

And perhaps those tears can weaken, not the tyranny, but the flames.

Now, let us set something ablaze tonight.

Let us find something to throw into my fire.

Although everything will be burnt one day, there should still be an order to things.

There should be due process.

For now, it will be this building.

As soon as I thought that, no, even before I thought that, I was already there.

I have no will. I have no intent.

That is what I am.

I am that which is here now.

I do not arrive before, nor do I arrive after.

Wherever it may be, I will appear.

Wherever it may be, I will spread my flames.

Looking up at my target with deliberation, I surveyed it.

Hmph.

I see.

It seems this will be easier to burn compared to that detached house or larger building.

Well, it makes no difference whether the task is simple or bothersome.

Now that my objective is fixed, hesitation is meaningless.

It is all the same.

I don’t know everything.

But I can burn everything.

Baring my fangs, I open my mouth wide.

And now, the flames.

The flames,

“– Nyah!”

but then,

in that instant, between me and my target — there came a cat.

A young silver-haired cat fell from the sky, as though having sprouted wings upon its back, and cut into my path.

Like this:

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 063

As I expected, the Tiger is standing right in front of Warren Villa, where Senjougahara Hitagi and her father lived nyah. I was planning on going up onto a roof or something right away and looking over the entire town just in case I was wrong — though I was certain that wasn't the case.

It's no mystery to me.

After all, me and the Tiger, we used to be one and the same nyah.

After all, we're the same, born from the same place nyah.

That's why.

"Yo, Tiger — "

I said.

Just a greeting nyah.

" — I'm here to bring you back. Let's go home together."

`……`

But, as I also expected, the Tiger isn't answering me at all.

It just wordlessly glared at me nyah.

Wow —

Now that we're actually facing each other, it strikes me again just how incredibly huge this tiger, this living creature is. Or rather, this monster — a real tiger can't be this gigantic nyah.

How should I put it? It's like I just can't grasp its scale.

I'm drawing from the wrong fairy tale here, but I get the feeling that slipping into its mouth like Tom Thumb and beating my way out from the inside would be the right way to exterminate it.

Nyah, maybe if I really were trying to exterminate it.

But that's not what I'm here for nyah.

`Out of my way.`

After keeping terribly silent for a while, the Tiger finally said this.

`I am going to burn that over there. You are in my way.`

"…Heh,"

I just, nyah — laughed.

It wasn't really a strained laugh, no, I just couldn't hold it in nyah.

I wonder why; it looks gigantic, and I can just feel the intimidation coming off it, so the words just now felt very serious — and the last time I met it, I was scared on the inside when I talked with it.

But that was wrong nyah.

It's — not serious at all.

It's just emotional.

Like a newborn baby, it just hasn't mastered the skills of conversation and communication — that's why we couldn't hold a conversation nyah.

I say newborn, but of course, it really was only born a few days ago, so it's only natural — an original abnormality, huh.

An original with no history nyah.

Something Mistress cut away from her own heart.

A new type of abnormality.

Still, it's actually not very rare to see original or independently created abnormalities — there was once an artist called Yoriyama Sekien who made a living off drawing works depicting various spectres, but sometimes, among all these traditional phantoms, he would nonchalantly slip in a monster of his own creation nyah.

That's because, whatever the time period, a creator always longs to indepedently create something that can rival the traditional nyah.

Of course, making said something which could rival a traditional monster would take a ridiculously vast amount of talent, or rather, energy nyah.

In Mistress' case, that energy,

would be her stress, or her dark emotions nyah — it's pretty ironic that the Tiger born from those emotions would come into this world lacking emotions, actually.

Or is that wrong nyah?

Maybe it doesn't lack emotion because it was just born, but because Mistress unconsciously, intentionally created the Tiger to be that way nyah.

It's exactly because it is born of these emotions, that she gave birth to a tiger with its emotions carved away.

Gave birth, to a wild beast.

`It will be burnt. I will burn it. Out of my way. It is all too late. I will burn it all. First, I will burn that house.`

"…Mistress isn't wishing for that nyah."

`Hmph.`

The Tiger dismissed my words with a sneer.

No nyah.

I don't think it even understands the meaning of my words.

I doubt it's as much an idiot as me, but it is even less flexible than me nyah.

`I do not care what that girl does or does not wish for. It is your decision to call her Mistress, but to me, *she is nothing*. Nothing more,`

Nothing more, than the fount from which my flaming impulse flows.

Said the Tiger.

"The fount from which your flame flows…? Something's not right with your wording there nyah."

There wasn't much meaning to it, but I decided to make a quip anyway.

Naturally, it didn't go across nyah.

It really wasn't trying to say something funny.

But, still,

“She’s *not* nothing, Tiger — she’s the parent who gave birth to us.”

`The parent who gave birth to us? All the more worthless.`

The Tiger muttered emotionlessly.

This isn’t turning out to be a conversation at all nyah.

`Does that girl not know more than anyone else just how worthless a birth parent is?`

“Oh, that might be true nyah — ”

Hit it right where it hurts nyah.

Nyah, maybe it’s because it was born that way or because it’s that kind of abnormality, but I guess this shrewdness is proof that it is a monster born from Mistress’ “fount”.

“Maybe that’s why Mistress called us her little sisters, not her daughters nyah.”

`Sisters — `

“Not that I know, but they’re apparently supposed to be *moe*, judging from what that human bastard taught me.”

Nyahaha, I laughed.

“That title might actually fit you pretty well. You’re a character that loves burning up nyah.”

`…Hmph. I have no interest in titles. I am a natural phenomenon, simply burning what I wish to burn. As an automated mechanism would.`

However, the Tiger,

continued to remain obstinate.

`I am not *moe*.`

“I see.”

Hmm.

Talking isn't going to work nyah.

Still, I have tried my best — nyah, I was trying pretty hard during that time before the Cultural Festival too, you know.

It may be hard to believe, but I really do think I overdid it back during Golden Week.

That's why I wanted to settle this as friendlily as possible nyah — but, putting aside that time before the Cultural Festival when I was facing that bastard, or in other words, facing a human, it's actually pretty depressing that I can't even communicate properly with another abnormality, not to mention one that was similarly created by Mistress.

I can't just push all the blame onto the Tiger nyah.

There's no way around it.

It's not like Mistress ever thought that she would be able to persuade the Tiger with words, and right now, we basically have the right guy in the right place nyah.

It's my job,

to bring back the daughter who ran away from home nyah.

Unlike me, the Tiger doesn't share memories with Mistress — doesn't share her emotions.

We may be the same kind of abnormality, but we are different types nyah.

That's why,

even though I am supposed to get through with words — "Hey, Tiger."

`What is it, Cat.`

"I'll make this clear first, but the way I see it, it's not for me to say anything about what you have done so far nyah. Whether it's burning down houses or burning up buildings, I won't hold them against you as crimes. Arson is just a human reason nyah."

And if we let *those* control us, over half of all abnormalities would be under crackdown, including the me during Golden Week nyah.

Besides, there is quite a large number of tiger abnormalities, and fire abnormalities ridiculously more than that nyah. They might as well be limitless. Seriously, the world is so overflowing with fire abnormalities, you could be forgiven for thinking, “aren’t all of these just, like, the same?”

You can’t possibly come down on all of that.

It would be the same as coming down on every single parking violation nyah.

`Of course. Which is why,`

“But,”

I interrupted whatever the Tiger was trying to say.

Interrupted — and glared.

“I already told you nyah. I won’t forgive you if you hurt Mistress.”

`Absurd.`

The Tiger put on a dubious expression, not, apparently, because my words weren’t getting through, but because it really didn’t understand nyah.

`That girl is nothing to me — as such, I have not even a speck of interest in harming her, but this feeling of wishing to burn this building flows forth from none other than your Mistress.`

“……”

That was probably true.

That was the truth, to this Tiger nyah.

Or, no — that would be the truth to anyone nyah.

Mistress felt envy for the Senjougahara home.

She was so jealous that she wanted to burn it to the ground.

That is the truth nyah.

It is also the truth that she felt envy for those two creatures she called her parents whom I sent to the hospital during Golden Week, and that she felt envy for the monkey girl who was the only one that human bastard relied upon.

But, nyah,

“*It’s just as much the truth that she was holding back that feeling* — you’re ignoring that, Tiger.”

`More words. I myself am the abnormality that she gave birth to as a result of her perseverence. Now she reaps what she has sown. My flames will make no assumptions on her circumstances.`

I will simply burn it. I will simply burn.

As though washing it all away, letting it all flow away, I will simply burn it all — I will make it disappear.

That is all I do.

The Tiger took a step towards me.

Nyah.

Surprisingly, it was the first to get impatient — nyah, its origin is fire, after all.

If its flames are kept in for too long, maybe it’ll be burnt black.

“As abnormalities go, you’re right nyah.”

I said.

That was something I had to admit nyah.

I was the one doing something not befitting abnormalities — in the first place, the creed of the Hindering Cat is to exact revenge, not return favors nyah.

If we are talking about abnormalities wanting to harm Mistress, then I was the very first one nyah.

Fickle as I am, I’ve had a change of mind.

And now — I am working for the sake of Mistress. Of course it doesn’t understand nyah.

It’s almost as if,

I were — human.

“But the one who lives in that house you’re trying to burn right now is a friend of Mistress nyah — at this hour, there’s no way it will be empty like the last two times.”

She’s probably just sleeping as usual nyah.

She might have sounded uneasy when she said that her home or the Araragi house might be burnt down, but she had no scruples about going to bed anyway.

If you trace along Mistress’ memories, you would understand why.

You would know —

that was how much she trusted Mistress.

That’s why I had to fight.

As Black Hanekawa.

As Hanekawa Tsubasa.

“And if she dies, Mistress will cry. I have to do whatever it takes to stop that nyah.”

`Hmph. I can assure you, that will not be the case.`

Said the Tiger, not even caring for my words.

`She will not cry. When she wishes to cry, she will cut away the part of her heart that wishes to cry. When she feels unpleasant, she will cut away the part of her heart that feels unpleasant. That — is how she has lived for these eighteen years. Giving birth to me and you. No, this is how she will live, from now on — `

Unto the end.

Giving birth to many a monster.

With only herself remaining pure white — remaining beautiful.

Hating and resenting none.

Kind and loving towards all.

Living beautifully.

Continuing on, as the ‘real deal’.

That’s what the Tiger said.

“That’s not true.”

And then — I,

no,

not me nyah — not *me*.

I,

I,

Hanekawa Tsubasa — denied this.

“I’ve decided to end all of that. I probably will hate. I probably will resent. I won’t be able to be kind to everyone like I’ve always done before, and I won’t be able to love everyone. I might be hated, and I might be despised. I might get angry more easily, and I might not be able to forgive. I will probably be annoyed and frustrated, too. I might be so smart anymore. I might not be able to laugh anymore. I might not be able to stop myself from crying anymore.”

That’s right.

This really will disappoint Araragi-kun.

Unmistakably, I would not be able to overlook his mischievousness as I have always done — but, considering the one we are dealing with, perhaps he would find that worth celebrating.

Because that’s the kind of person he is.

Because he *is* kind.

Oh — I am so jealous.

“But that’s all right. I’m all right with that.”

I am sick of this.

Of turning my back on reality, and pushing the role of the muddied villain onto the two of you.

Is that not the same,

as doing to the two of you, what has been done to me?

“I don’t want to be the ‘real deal’. I want to be a real human.”

Said I.

“I don’t have to be beautiful. I don’t want to be white at all. I want to be in the

mud, together with the two of you.”

I can’t remain forever as a girl who never knew of the mud — I *want* to know.

But I don’t want to become black.

I want to accept both black and white together, at the same time.

I want to become a grey-colored adult.

Not even crying when I got my heart broken — I am fed up with living like that.

“Please come back to me. It’s — past curfew already.”

Let’s have our meal together.

Saying this, I stretched my hand out to the Tiger.

I stretched my hand out to the past.

`……`

More words.

Saying this, the Tiger — bared its fangs, and pounced.

Like this:

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 064

Of course, we reversed instantly and I came back — but now, we have a slight problem nyah.

Basically, the abnormality which I am based on, the Hindering Cat, really isn't something you can count on in a fight. I am a ridiculously weak, low-level phantom nyah.

Not the front line-type nyah.

Facing off against the Tiger, free and unrestricted by any base, is just a little out of my style nyah (I know 'style' is the wrong term to use here, but so what?! As long as people get what you mean who cares if you misuse it! It's friggin' annoying to say 'out of my *league*' every single time! I'm on the brink of an eat-or-be-eaten situation here nyah!)

Besides, it might be normal to think that I'm the elder and the Tiger is the younger just because I was born first, but we are abnormalities nyah.

Mistress described the Araragi sisters and their bastard of a brother as differently-aged triplets, and me and Mistress and the Tiger, we're pretty like that too — but it's possible that the Tiger is not in fact the youngest nyah.

After all, stress is something born from the conflicts between emotions — if Mistress was the fount of the Tiger, then maybe, the Tiger was the fount of me nyah.

I was only *born* first. Maybe the Tiger had been there before that.

That's why, to make a very simple comparison, the Tiger should be much higher ranked an abnormality than Black Hanekawa, and more annoyingly, the Tiger is the next in the product line nyah.

When it comes to computers and machines, don't later units tend to be superior?

By the same logic, there's no way I can take down the Tiger if we fight normally nyah.

Compared to when she gave birth to me, Mistress has gotten more deeply skilled at ‘creating abnormalities’ nyah — like the note said, that’s why it turned out to be a tiger nyah.

Anyone could clearly see who the winner and the loser would be in a fight between a cat and a tiger nyah.

Anyone would be able to see it.

It makes me want to turn my back to it nyah.

…But Mistress has decided not to turn her eyes away — decided to stand up against it, so I can’t exactly turn tail and run nyah.

And besides, the Hindering Cat,

doesn’t have a tail nyah —

“…phew,”

I escaped the fangs of the Tiger by a hair’s breadth — but as the saying goes, ‘you can’t catch the cubs without entering the tiger’s den’, so I slipped under its huge body nyah.

A tactic that uses the enemy’s great size nyah.

There’s even a proverb, ‘a cornered rat will bite the cat’, so it’s not so strange for a cat to bite a tiger — not to mention, “Nnn… nyaahhh!”

I still have,

my trump card as the Hindering Cat — in other words, my Energy Drain!

Vitality absorption.

It will work even if the opponent is an abnormality nyah — if I can **absorb** the Tiger and then return to Mistress, my goal is achieved.

Mistress’ wish,

will be granted.

Nyah, it might be a bit too rough seeing as I’m just supposed to bring back a sister who ran away from home, but we can talk it over once we are back nyah.

There’s no wonder drug for a family problem nyah.

We can’t just suddenly come to an understanding, like some family drama that’s just too good to be true — it’s been cut away from Mistress, and cut itself off from Mistress, for eighteen years now.

They can’t just go back to the way they were right away nyah.

There’s nothing for them to go back to in the first place.

They have no choice but to rebuild it all from square one nyah.

Today is just the first step nyah — and,

hanging onto its belly — I embraced the Tiger.

With my entire body.

With all my strength.

To attain the greatest performance of my Energy Drain, I did everything possible to touch the Tiger’s body with my own.

`Hmph — `

“Nya… *aaaaaaaaaah* — !”

Against the Tiger’s short grunt — I gave a great cry.

It wasn’t a shout I gave to fire myself up, making sure that I never let go.

It wasn’t nyah.

Energy Drain, my special trait as an abnormality, is the only thing that gives me an opening to defeat the Tiger, but going by that same line of thought, I had to also consider the special trait of the Inflaming Tiger.

An abnormality with an affinity to fire.

The Inflaming Tiger.

In this case, I came up with three patterns.

The pattern that’s easiest to understand nowadays would be what is called ‘pyrokinesis’ nyah. However, a special trait of being able to light the target on fire simply by thinking it would be closer to a psychic power than an abnormal phenomenon. I get that feeling that that would be a human’s skill, not an abnormality’s (whether or not I actually believe in psychic powers is another

matter nyah). If the Tiger really were causing fires by using pyrokinesis, then to be honest, I wouldn't be able to do a thing nyah — anyone would be burnt to cinders as soon as they entered its line of sight nyah.

But like I said, I didn't think this would be the case to begin with, and in fact, despite our very long talk not even my clothes were burnt, let alone my actual person, and its first attack was an animal 'bite', so I can be sure there's no need to hold back on that front nyah.

So we move on to Pattern 2.

You can say this is also quite easy to understand, and comparatively easier to imagine, but basically, it could be that the Tiger breathed fire from its mouth — or shoot flames from its paws, or something along those lines nyah. In that case, it could 'bite' and 'claw' in tandem and it wouldn't contradict with its form as a wild beast nyah.

It's an old stand-by in children's cartoons and creature features for the monsters to breathe fire nyah — from this point of view, the biggest possibility is that this is how the Tiger's ability to ignite flames works.

And really, I was hoping for it to be this way nyah.

But it wasn't.

It wasn't Pattern 1, which was the worst one of all — But the Tiger's affinity was Pattern 3.

"Nyah — *hot* — !"

Without thinking, I nearly withdrew the two arms clinging to the Tiger's body, but I adjusted my hold just as I was about to let go.

The Tiger's body,

became a flame.

"So *your whole body is fire* — I thought so nyah!"

It's not like there aren't abnormalities that can breathe fire, but this is the standard, after all nyah!

Stickler for rules that she is, of course Mistress followed an older example

when creating an abnormality!

What she created was unpretentious, and orthodox — She created a will o' the wisp nyah!

`Do not be thoughtless, Cat.`

Said the Tiger.

`It is the law of beasts to fear the flame, but to embrace it — even as a beast, your actions err, much less as an abnormality.`

It's — totally composed nyah.

Of course.

It's for the same reason why, even when I carried that vampire and my Energy Drain involuntarily activated regardless of who was being touched — Oshino Shinobu was still doing fine nyah.

Basically, the ability of Energy Drain, which appeared invincible at first glance, did in fact have a weak point.

A weak point, or rather, a structural defect nyah.

A defect by necessity.

No matter how much I absorb the energy off a target, if said target has a practically infinite reservoir of it, then the result is just the same as how a dam can't just dry up nyah — of course, I doubt that the Tiger, as the incarnation of Mistress' dark emotions, and its energy could rival a vampire's, but, its energy is, as it is, heat energy.

Fire itself nyah.

It's clear as day that I will be roasted before I can possibly absorb it all nyah —

"…*Screw that*! I knew already!"

And it was all the more reason why,

knowing that it was clear, I — yelled.

I cried — as a cat.

"I may be an idiot, but I know a cat can't beat a tiger nyah!"

Even a cornered rat will bite the cat — but biting is all that it can do nyah.

It's not like it can win, or beat it back.

It will just end up being eaten by an enraged cat nyah.

End up just like me.

To be honest, thinking that this Energy Drain can work on the Tiger or give me an opening or somesuch, I didn't even believe in half of any of it — I knew that it wasn't even worth betting on.

I just pretended not to know nyah.

`Then,`

The Tiger asked.

It asked, looking down at me pathetically dangling from its body.

`Then why — why be so thoughtless? Why be so senseless? Why do something so meaningless?`

"Because,"

I said.

"Mistress asked me to."

`……`

"Mistress asked me to."

It just doesn't get it nyah.

You were just born, so of course you don't understand nyah.

You just don't know how happy it is, to be asked for help by Mistress, who has been doing absolutely everything by herself — you don't know how happy it is, to be asked for help, pride or no pride, shamelessly, by Mistress, who has been trying to work out absolutely everything by herself — asking me, just a cat that got run over.

She asked me, brazenly.

She called me her little sister.

She called me, family.

“She asked me with a ‘please’ — to take care of you!”

And — I looked at Warren Villa.

In the same way, Senjougahara Hitagi asked me to take care of someone too.

Take care, of Mistress —

“…*Nyaaaaah* — !”

Without even knowing what temperature the Tiger now was, I wrapped my arms around it even more tightly — and pressed my face in, rubbing my cheeks against it.

My clothes have already been burnt.

Hot. Hot. Hot. Hot.

Hot. Hot. Hot. Hot.

It feels like I am embracing the sun.

Maybe that really is what I am doing nyah.

It wouldn’t be strange for the flames of jealousy that Mistress had been pooling together to turn into such a mass nyah — and that’s all the more reason why,

I have to swallow it all down.

Let it burn hotter, let it grow bigger.

I can’t let it go nyah.

It’s something I can’t stop embracing —

It’s an emotion nyah.

“Uu…
nyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh — !”

`Pest.`

The Tiger tensed.

As though it were drying itself after being drenched, the Tiger shook its body

— and just like that, I was blown away.

I slammed against a nearby concrete fence.

“Nyah — !”

Even as I heard my own cry, the extreme temperature difference made me lose consciousness for a moment.

No, I can’t nyah. I can’t go unconscious now nyah.

My whole body is practically on fire right now.

If I lose consciousness now and change places with Mistress, she will die instantly from the burns all over her body — it’s because I am an abnormality that I can still handle this temperature nyah.

“Ugh…”

But… that was some serious power.

There really is no comparison nyah.

Speaking of which, there is apparently this abnormality good at *sumo* called a *Ghost Flame* (What’s the deal with that, huh?) — but the Tiger had a monstrous strength that was superior to that nyah.

That son of a bitch. Which, in this case, is also an odd thing for me to say.

I managed to hold on to my consciousness, barely, but with just that one attack I can’t even move my body anymore nyah.

Not a finger nyah.

What’s the matter with me?

Even after getting all fired up and bracing myself, I still ended up like this — that’s just pathetic nyah.

Nyahaha.

But this is how hard that human bastard has always worked himself — he’s fought a lot of different things nyah.

Even as he cried.

even as he endlessly complained.

He did cry, didn’t he?

That’s right nyah.

If only Mistress had cried too nyah —

She’s been so sad.

She’s been so lonely.

She’s been so frustrated.

If she’d done that, then even if she hadn’t given birth to me or the Tiger — things might have actually gone better.

Wait, it’s the other way around.

It’s because we are here that Mistress does not cry.

That’s, nyah, of course nyah.

If she had had little sisters like us,

our big sister wouldn’t have cried nyah — `Feeble creature. Is this it?`

Said the Tiger.

It was expressionless.

Emotionless.

Bit by bit — it crept over, like a heat wave.

`Is this all you have to show for your so-called ‘obligations’?`

“……”

`Hmph. Very well. We are kin, born from the same womb. As such, I will drag you down to Hell personally.`

The mass of flame coolly murmured these fearsome words.

Down to Hell, huh.

A bit better than a nightmare, at least.

But — I really don’t want to die so many times nyah.

I died getting run over by a car.

I died running after Mistress.

Now I'm going to die getting run down by a tiger.

Just how many times do I have to die nyah?

They say that the only cure for stupidity is death, but that's a lie nyah.

I'm just going to be stupid, forever —

"Geez, I really was happy, you know nyah."

Still, maybe this is the untamed part of me talking, but when the Tiger entered my vision, slowly drawing closer while on guard against my Energy Drain,

I muttered nyah.

Are these my last words?

No, it isn't.

I'm just being a sore loser nyah.

"I fight with my life on the line, and all I can manage is slowing your fire down for ten seconds — it's horrible, knowing how weak I am nyah."

`That — was what I had told you.`

Said the Tiger.

Indifferent as ever, of course.

Just an indifferent — surge of emotions.

`It was thoughtless. It was senseless. It was meaningless.`

"It was thoughtless nyah. It was senseless nyah. It was meaningless nyah."

Goodness.

You know, in the end, I never did get a chance to say it.

Even though I loved him so much.

So much so that I turned into a monster.

I never once told Araragi-kun that I loved him — "It was thoughtless. It was senseless. It was meaningless."

“That’s not true, Hanekawa.”

And then,

in an instant — the swing of a *nodachi* came flying down from the night sky.

It pierced through the head of the Tiger, and fixed itself into the ground.

That sword — I,

I knew it.

It is inscribed — the magic sword *Kokorowatari*, ‘Heartcrosser’.

Unparalleled across the ages, the blade of the slayer of abnormalities —

“……!”

“It might have been thoughtless. It might have been senseless. But — it definitely wasn’t meaningless. If you hadn’t risked your life to slow this tiger down for just ten seconds, I wouldn’t have made it in time.”

His black hair had fully grown out since Spring Break.

His frame was small and neat.

His clothes were in tatters, and one of his shoes had come off.

How horribly worried he must have been, how terrifying a journey he must have had — the figure now standing here before me was more than enough to tell his story.

“And if that happened, I would definitely cry.”

As he grasped the hilt of the sword,

Araragi-kun — smiled.

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 065

“…Ah, ahh,”

Araragi-kun.

Araragi-kun. Araragi-kun.

Araragi-kun, Araragi-kun, Araragi-kun — I hurt all over from the heat.

Due to my consciousness firmly surfacing, I felt pain for the burns all over my body — but I did not pay this the least bit of attention.

Because my heart is burning with far hotter a blaze.

Well, well.

So Tsukihi-chan was right, after all.

It *is* love which inflames the heart — much more so than envy.

The sight of Araragi-kun alone is making me burn up like this — even though it has only been a few days.

It felt to me like we had not met in centuries.

“Araragi-kun… why are you here?”

“C’mon, don’t ask stupid questions like that, Hanekawa.”

You’ll hurt my feelings, said Araragi-kun.

“You’re in trouble. Of course I’d come running. What else do you think?”

“…Ahaha. Oh, well said.”

I involuntarily laughed.

Really, that was quite a thing to say.

And it had only been a short while ago that he helped the unfolding of an epic adventure together with Mayoi-chan and Kanbaru-san.

He got hurt all over again…

He is injured here and there, and covered in wounds.

He had probably been doing many thoughtless things.

He had probably been doing many senseless things.

But…

He had not done any meaningless things.

“Actually, I dropped everything and came running after I saw that picture you sent of you wearing casual clothes!”

“Oh, no, no, no.”

Please let that be a joke.

Besides, those clothes belonged to Araragi-kun.

And they were mostly burnt to tatters now.

`*Ugh… gaah,*`

Below Araragi-kun — it moaned.

The Tiger moaned.

`*Aaaahhhhh*… it hurts. It hurts. It hurts. It’s hot. It hurts. It’s hot. It’s hot. It’s hot. It’s hot — ”

“Whoa,”

Seeing this, Araragi-kun drew out the sword from the Tiger’s throat with a single motion.

It was a very well-practised motion.

Truly, just how much carnage has he descended into these few days for his caliber as a warrior to have apparently increased like this?

“Um, are you… Black Hanekawa? Right now, I mean. Well, I guess that still makes you Hanekawa… but, you grew ears, and your hair’s white — ”

“All of it is me.”

“I see.”

Nodding, Araragi-kun took the dying tiger — the mass of emotions still stubbornly sputtering by the scruff of its neck, and dragged it in front of me.

He pulled that great, fierce beast, easily weighing over five hundred kilograms,

right in front of me.

” — Well, you’re not going to exterminate it, right?”

Sorry, but I went ahead and read that letter of yours, said Araragi-kun.

Apparently, he returned to his room once before racing over here — well, of course, how else could he have known to come ‘here’?

“I stabbed it in the vitals with *Kokorowatari* so it’s not going to last very long. If you are going to absorb it, you better hurry.”

“……”

If he’s read it already… then he already knows everything.

He knows, if I did that, I would no longer be myself.

At the very least — I would not be the me that I have always been.

He said it while knowing this.

“…Is that, all right with you, Araragi-kun?”

And yet,

I needed to confirm it with words, even if Araragi-kun did understand everything.

I relied on his kindness.

Even though, to the last,

I remained stubborn and never did say anything like, ‘help me’.

“Is it all right, if I am not myself anymore?”

“Like I said — don’t ask stupid questions like that, Hanekawa.”

He immediately replied.

“You said it yourself just now, didn’t you? No matter what, in the end, it’s all you. Even if you change, you’ll still be you. So don’t worry. It’s not like I will go easy on you for any weird reasons. If you turn out hateful, I will dislike you. If you do wrong, I will be angry at you. If you are despised, I will stick up for you. And if

you aren’t as smart anymore — well, I can teach you.”

And if you cry, I will comfort you.

Saying this, Araragi-kun —

stroked my head.

“……!”

This act,

burned my heart — to cinders.

It can’t be described as just ‘heat’ anymore.

Yes.

All this time — I wanted someone to do this to me.

I wanted someone to brush my head gently.

I wanted someone to caress me.

“Hey, Araragi-kun,”

“Yeah?”

“I am in love with you.”

I said.

“Would you be with me forever?”

I finally managed to say it.

These simple words — have taken nearly half a year for me to say.

After receiving my sudden confession, Araragi-kun looked only slightly surprised and, with a troubled smile on his face, “I see.”

said this.

“I’m really, really happy for that. But I’m sorry. There’s already a girl I like.”

“Right. I knew that.”

I raised my head and looked forward.

Warren Villa, Room 201.

She must be right there — sleeping with her father.

“Do you like her more than me?”

“Yeah.”

Although I meant only to tease, he answered my question frankly.

But it made me very happy.

Of course, it also hurt me much more.

“…Sigh, I got rejected, huh.”

That’s right.

That’s fine.

This is correct.

I confessed, and I was rejected.

It is very saddening.

But if I had never experienced such sadness — how could I possibly go on a journey to find myself around the world?

It wouldn’t be a journey to find myself *or* a journey to create myself.

How could I take a holiday to mourn for lost love — without ever having been lovelorn?

I never did manage to save, ‘help me’.

But I’ve managed to say, ‘I love you’.

I said it.

Of course, Araragi-kun has known about my feelings for a long time. He understand that before the Cultural Festival.

And if he’s read the note in his room, then he would be able to understand once again.

But having him understand is not good enough.

I have to make him understand.

I have to hear an answer.

I have to know how Araragi-kun feels about me.

I have to hear this from him.

Now that I have finally heard a response — now that I have been rejected,

I have finally been hurt.

I stretched out my hand, touched the brow of the Tiger — and stroked the head of the third me.

The thing that made me so happy was now being done in turn, to the flame of emotions still burning before me.

I stroked my own sputtering emotions.

Energy Drain.

This would be the last Energy Drain.

This will heal the burns all over my body — and in its place, a tempest of emotions surged inside me.

They are the dark emotions I have accumulated over eighteen years.

And my stress, as well.

All that which I have pushed onto Black Hanekawa, onto the Tiger — is now returning to me, with interest.

“Uu… *uuuu*……”

Why did this happen, I wonder?

Before I realized it.

“*Uu… uuu… uwaah…*”

Before I realized it, I was crying.

Perhaps I could not withstand the flood of emotions that had flooded inside me, or perhaps it was due to the pain of the stress accompanying said emotions, or perhaps it was because I had just experienced the pain of lost love — but, right before Araragi-kun’s eyes,

without hesitation,

like a child,

like a baby, I wailed.

“*Uwaaaahhh, aah, sniff, uu… uwaaaaaaaahh* — !”

That is why, on this day —

I am finally born, I think.

As promised, Araragi-kun comforted me until I stopped crying.

Without a word,

he continued to stroke my head, gently through the night.

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Nekomonogatari (White) : 066

This is the epilogue.

Or rather, all that has happened so far should be considered the prologue.

My story begins today.

First of all would be what Araragi-kun had actually been up to those past few days while absent from school, but he refused to speak on this matter. Well, Kanbaru-san also came to school as normal the next day (and aside from her left arm, she didn't have injuries all over her body like Araragi-kun had), he told me not to worry about Mayoi-chan, and his momentarily-severed bond with Shinobu-chan had returned, so everything worked out well — I suppose.

It remains unknown as to how exactly Gaen-san and Episode-kun were involved in this and how they had interacted but, well, this *is* Araragi-kun we are talking about here.

Something very painful must have taken place.

And he probably overcame it.

That's how I would like myself to be as well.

And then, I had a chance to talk to Shinobu-chan, whose pairing with Araragi-kun was as mentioned restored, and after hearing my experiences while Araragi-kun had been absent, "A *Kasha*, that was."

she said this.

"It might not have possessed a base, but I daresay it was modelled after the *Kasha*. It appears to me to have been an abnormality created whilst heeding the *Kasha*, not the Ghost Flame."

"A *Kasha*?"

Speaking of which, while I had spoken with Shinobu-chan on numerous occasions as Black Hanekawa, this was the first time I had talked with her like this. As that occured to me, I asked.

“But, a *Kasha*…”

“What is the matter, monitress? Do you not know of it?”

“No, I do know what it is, but…”

I was trying to be polite in a way, considering the 500-year-old abnormality I was dealing with, but seeing as the one before me was an eight-year-old little girl, it was rather difficult.

“But, um, it’s a tiger.”

“As I heard from the Hindering Cat as well, so I did not quite see the connection — but, if aligned to fire, a *Kasha* it must be.”

“Huh — ”

The *Kasha*, the Flaming Cart, was an abnormality that drags corpses down to Hell — and speaking of which, the Tiger had said something like that as well — which, in many cases, was treated as *a cat abnormality*.

A cat.

— *She saw me.*

— *That is the only crucial point.*

The Tiger had said that as well.

Basically, as soon as you saw the Tiger, you would be drawn directly to Hell without question —

” — But it’s *not* a cat. It’s a tiger.”

“Are they not alike?”

“It’s *not* a cart. It’s a tiger.”

“Do you not know of the Black Tiger? It also goes by the name of *Kuruma* Shrimp.”

(*kuruma* is also the pronunciation of ‘car’) “……”

‘Black Tiger’?

But then — is that why it was a *Kasha*, a flaming tiger?

If I must say, it sounded more like a coincidence… but it was a name by Gaen-san, after all.

Well, I suppose it was *my* name.

In that case,

“Behind the Hindering Cat, an abnormality ran over by a car, followed a Flaming Cart pulling the dead into Hell — an interesting bond, is it not? Hahaha, he who has suffered the aberrant is drawn to it, as the Aloha brat would say.”

“Actually, it sounds more like a game of word association… hmph — so even though the Tiger didn’t have an abnormality like the Hindering Cat as its foundation, it also isn’t a completely original abnormality.”

“True originality does not exist — that is the wall eventually barring the path of all creators past and present across the world. It was no different for Sekien. Doubtless the tiger of flame which you have conjured is simply that, not simply the fruit of the Ghost Flame or the *Kasha* or somesuch, but of your hoarded knowledge, and the ties you accrued with others. Liberated it may be, but free it is not.”

“Art begins in imitation, huh.”

“Quite a servile and defeatist state of mind to possess, that.”

Shinobu-chan laughed, her shoulders shaking.

A ghastly laugh.

“Rather, consider it as following in the footsteps of your great predecessor. Every man follows another. Every man succeeds another. Accept the pass that came from the ages gone by, and connect it to the ones to come. In such a way, someone, someday might be able to put one through the hoop, and the match will continue after the shot. Such is lineage. Such is tradition. Perhaps one day, someone will follow the Black Hanekawa or the Inflaming Tiger you have imagined, as well.”

“Hmm.”

I wouldn’t want that.

However, if my foolishness could become a lesson for someone in the ages to

come, then perhaps there was meaning to it.

Even my worthless story,

might be of use to someone, someday.

So I thought.

Now, of course, seeing as Araragi-kun had returned, I in turn had to leave the Araragi house — Araragi-kun,

“Don’t worry about it. I can sleep on the floor, so just use the bed. I can sleep under the bed, even. Hell, just use *me* as a bed. I’ll make sure to close my eyes when you change.”

had quite kindly attempted to convince me to stay, but I could feel it as nothing but a threat to my chastity, so I respectfully took my leave.

I was happy that he would interact with me as he had always done, but at the same time, it also represented his unshakable feelings, which was as painful to see as I had expected.

Although surprisingly, perhaps if I had continued remaining at the Araragi house, it might have been a threat to Araragi-kun’s chastity instead.

Karen-chan had said that, “Nii-chan should just get out and we can have Tsubasa-san,” (which was horrible) but of course, that could not have been the case.

Their family was,

in the end, their own.

I could not wedge myself in.

It might have been only two nights on reflection, but I left the Araragi house after giving proper thanks to all its members.

After that, I went back to the home of Senjougahara-san — Warren Villa Room 201, which had almost been burnt down.

As I understood it, Senjougahara-san’s father would be leaving on a business trip overseas for the span of about half a month — and as such, he himself requested if I would spend said period with his daughter.

It was just for my convenience, of course.

Such a trip could not have been scheduled so suddenly — not unless he himself wanted it to be.

It would seem that Senjougahara-san had told her father about the circumstances and arranged all of this for me. Regardless of when Araragi-kun would be returning home, I certainly could not live in his house for an extended period, and she understood that.

In other words — even this had all been part of her scheme.

“Hitagi, a long time ago, I taught you to become a woman who would be able to help a friend when they were in need.”

Just before he left, Senjougahara-san’s father, holding a largish bag which he had prepared for the trip, said this.

“And you grew up to be just such a woman. Nothing could make me happier.”

Saying this, he gently brushed his daughter’s head.

The expression on her face then was unforgettable.

And the expression on his face, as well.

For some time after that, I would continue to live as Senjougahara-san’s roommate, but of course, not everything went smoothly.

Frankly speaking, having taken in both the Hindering Cat and the Inflaming Tiger within myself, I was at the height of emotional instability. At the very least, I doubt I was a comfortable roommate to live with.

However, Senjougahara-san supported me all the same.

“After all, I am no different.”

She said to me,

and taught me how she had overcome the swell of emotions, step by step.

We clashed, and we fought.

But we would reconcile afterwards.

As I watched the days go by, I understood — the reason why I could not envy

the girl who I should have been so jealous of, the one who was with the Araragi-kun I loved so much.

Yes, of course.

I had probably known since the very beginning.

Araragi-kun.

Senjougahara-san.

That the two of them would end up with each other; that the two of them would end up with each other; I had understood it — I had known it.

In the end, I really don't know everything.

But I knew that.

That was why, the emotion I felt when encouraging the two to develop their relationship ever since Mother's Day — hadn't been a lie after all.

"You know, Hanekawa-san,"

Said Senjougahara-san.

"I thought it was the opposite. Ever since I saw the two of you in April, I thought for sure that you were dating. And even if that hadn't been the case, I was sure that you were in love with each other. That's why I was so shocked when I asked Araragi-kun only for him to deny it."

Although.

Although it's only now that I can say it out loud, she said, and continued.

"When I confessed to Araragi-kun, I thought I would be rejected. Of course, at that time, I was ready to do anything it took to have him accept, but I won't deny that, in a way, I had nothing to lose by trying. After all, it seemed so obvious to me that Araragi-kun liked you — I was sure, then, that I fell in love with the Araragi-kun who was in love with you."

"I see. Well, it really was the opposite for me."

I said that to Senjougahara-san.

I think I said it with a smile.

“I don’t think I would have fallen in love him this much if he hadn’t been in love with you.”

That’s right — although it might have been absolutely nothing out of the ordinary,

we both fell in love with his kindness.

With his fickle heart,

never cutting anything away, or tossing anything aside.

Thank goodness — for this feeling, of never having once hated Senjougahara-san over Araragi-kun, and this feeling alone was truly an emotion of my own, the one that I could not cut away.

But, naturally, I could not deny also feeling, “Why can’t *I* be like that?” so I would sometimes pull pranks on her at night, and the way Senjougahara-san would react in such occasions were similarly irresistible.

I understand now.

I love Araragi-kun,

but I love Senjougahara-san as well.

Having admitted this to myself, I felt my heart had finally managed to break for the first time.

The pain accompanied me as my heart was broken.

This lifestyle continued for around ten days.

And finally, the day came.

They had found a home to rent in place of the burnt-down Hanekawa house — in which case, I had no choice but to go.

“You don’t have to go so soon. Why don’t you take it slowly until you feel ready?” worried Senjougahara-san, but I was all right.

She did not need to worry at all.

To her,

“Thank you,”

I said,

“I’ll come over to visit again soon.”

And left Warren Villa behind in high spirits — no, that was a lie.

I cried out loud.

It was very difficult leaving Senjougahara-san, and thinking of the life I had before me was very disheartening.

Yes, the Tiger had been correct.

Truly, I was feeble.

I easily broke into tears.

But Senjougahara-san cried for me as well, so perhaps we were even.

Speaking of which, along the way from Warren Villa to the new home, I ran into Sengoku-chan.

Sengoku Nadeko — the middle-schooler with a connection to Araragi-kun.

However, we had never been in contact much, and she was also with her parents, so I did not raise my voice. She did not seem to notice me, either.

Their family seemed to get along well.

Thinking this — I became jealous.

Wait, that’s bad, that’s bad, and I drowned out that emotion.

But, no, it wouldn’t do to drown it out.

I was the kind of person who would envy such a sight.

I should start by accepting that.

I should live on while making sure that the flame in my heart was lit — after all, was fire not the great symbol of civilization?

Surely, I would be able to evolve.

I might not be able to be like Kanbaru-san, but for now, by walking and being able to take in the sight of such a happy family, I was widening my vision — I believe that *I have already begun*.

By the way, the case of the burning of the Hanekawa house, as well as the tutorial school, was settled as a natural fire, or accidents, more-or-less — something to do with the window glass becoming a lens, or an unusual dryness in the summer air, or something.

I see.

That was how the world would make itself coherent, it seemed.

That was how the paradox would be solved.

Nevertheless, I doubt I would ever forget what I did.

Even if I were never charged for my crimes, it did not make me free of them.

That was something that all living things must always bear in mind —

One can never be pure white.

So I thought.

The house I arrived at was not all that big, as it was apparently just a temporary residence for them until a new house was built. In fact, it might even count under the definition of ‘small’.

There were not exactly many rooms, either.

But I had already made it clear, to the one whom I ought to call my father, and the one whom I ought to call my mother.

As soon as I heard that they had decided on a place to rent, I said,

“Father, Mother, I would like to have a room.”

As such.

As such, for the first time in my life, I had obtained my own room.

I did not want the little sisters in my heart to feel cramped.

That’s right.

She wasn’t gone.

The Tiger wasn’t gone, either —

They were in my heart.

And I wasn't gone, either.

The me in the past was in my heart, as well.

It suddenly occured me.

The honor student, the class rep among class reps, kind to everyone, fair, smart, saintly — perhaps that me, the one who Araragi-kun had gave such praises to, was the very first abnormality I had created.

The one that Araragi-kun had called 'the real deal', the one that Senjougahara-san had called a monster, that was the very first 'me' I had created.

That was the ideal I had wanted to become — for the sake of doing so, I killed many forms of myself.

It was something which should not have been done.

The first thing cut off from my heart was none other than my self — it was never a matter of which one being the real me, which one being my true form, which personality being dominant or which one holding the initiative.

It was all a part of myself.

So perhaps — the me in the present, and the me in the past, and the me who would exist from here on, had remained unchanged in our nature.

Just as how, no matter how much he tried to change, Araragi-kun would always continue on as himself — no matter which 'me' I was, I would never change.

That was all there was to it.

Nothing had changed for me.

And that — was not my epilogue, so much as it was my punchline.

I am me.

I am Hanekawa Tsubasa.

My cat ears may have already withdrawn, and I may no longer see the Tiger, but I daresay the white hair remaining on half of my head, arranged in a tiger-striped pattern, is proof of that.

Being rather too avant-garde for school, I have to dye it black every morning, but I don't think of that as a bother or a waste of time.

It is a form of communication, with them,

with my heart.

I say it is enjoyable, because I truly feel it inside.

Yeah.

That's — how I will go on.

Even if I do not change, it will change.

My life, will change.

I open the front door using the key I was handed — but it seems both of them are still at work and no one is at home.

It may be a completely unfamiliar home, but it doesn't feel like I am sneaking into someone else's house. In fact, it feels like a home I am already used to. Is this how it's supposed to feel? I've only just opened the front door by myself.

Up the stairs I go, feeling strange.

Step by step,

digesting it slowly.

When I put my foot on the last step, reaching the second floor, I suddenly recall Mayoi-chan.

When I first met her, she had always been lost.

The Lost Cow — oh, I see.

Surprisingly, perhaps the reference with the greatest influence on my creation of the Tiger hadn't been the *Kasha* or the Ghost Flame, but the Lost Cow.

Of course, the Lost Cow had already been cut away from Mayoi-chan, but you could consider it a rough echo.

Perhaps my meeting the Tiger directly after seeing Mayoi-chan was not simply because I then knew Araragi-kun had gone.

It seems that, once upon a time, cows and tigers were mixed together — in

which case, it isn’t unthinkable.

For me, having lost both family and home — it was a fitting abnormality.

Ever since that day,

no, ever since I first met Mayoi-chan in that park in May — I have been lost.

Walking aimlessly, moving cyclically, wandering all over the place.

I was just loitering.

I should talk about this with Mayoi-chan the next time I see her.

So I thought.

I really have been lost enough.

I was lost in losing my way.

But thanks to that, I have met many different people.

Many, many indeed.

I have seen many families.

I have seen many forms of myself.

That was why I could become myself.

If the me in the past is still me, then so is the me in the future.

There does not exist a moment in time when I am not myself.

So how would I be like the next day?

With anticipation, I put my hand on the doorknob.

It is the room which I have been given.

A 12 x 9, Western-style room.

It will only be for the next half-year until graduation — but it is certainly, truly, a place of my own.

A place of our own.

It is then that I suddenly remember the sentence added at some point to the letter I had left behind.

No, it isn’t long enough to call a sentence — it isn’t even a single line, but just two words.

It is the only greeting I have ever received from the white cat who has always been by my side, who has always protected me.

It is nothing out of the ordinary.

Just a greeting that everyone would naturally give, every single day.

But this will be the first time I have ever spoken those words.

“I’m home.”

I enter my room.

I’m finally back.

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